
Subject: Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) 2021 Annual Conference

Report to: Regional Council

Report date: Thursday, May 20, 2021

Recommendations

1. That the advocacy issues identified in Report CAO 9-2021 **BE ENDORSED** as delegation requests during the 2021 AMO Conference; and
2. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to request meetings with cabinet ministers, parliamentary assistants, senior ministry staff, and opposition party leaders to discuss regional advocacy issues during the AMO Conference.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview on the preliminary details of the 2021 Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference and seek endorsement on the regional advocacy issues requested to be addressed during the delegation meetings with senior provincial leaders
- The AMO Conference and AGM will be occurring virtually from August 15-18
- The virtual conference will continue to provide the opportunity for municipalities to meet with Ministers, Parliamentary Assistants, senior ministry staff, and Party Leaders via video conferencing on key policy issues
- Proposed ministry delegation issues consider the current provincial interest in economic recovery solutions, issues previously identified as regional priorities, probability of successfully securing a meeting with the appropriate ministry, and other opportunities to delegate to Ministers on Regional matters (OBCM/MARCO meeting)
- The AMO Conference will offer one of the few opportunities remaining to present it's priority issues to all government leaders before the June 2022 provincial election

Financial Considerations

As a result of the AMO Conference occurring virtually, it offers significant costs savings by eliminating travel, accommodation, and meal expenses. In addition, AMO is providing a reduced registration rate, which saves registrants almost 20% on the original registration fee.

Members of Regional Council who wish to be added to the list of AMO Conference registrants are advised to contact the Regional Clerk's Office.

Analysis

Due to ongoing public health measures, the Association of Municipalities' of Ontario Conference will be proceeding virtually from August 15-18, 2021. The Conference occurs annually and provides an opportunity to highlight key policy and advocacy issues to provincial Ministers, Parliamentary Assistants and party leaders. It is an opportunity for Niagara Region to:

- Advance issues;
- Highlight policy and program concerns;
- Access funding;
- Highlight the work taking place at the Region
- Propose or establish partnership on new Regional initiatives; and
- Build a profile and relationships with the provincial government

Despite its virtual nature, the key features of the Conference will still be available. Preliminary Conference program details, including the merits of on-demand concurrent sessions and plenary programming are available on AMO's website at www.amo.on.ca/program.

As the Provincial parties begin to prepare for the forthcoming June 2, 2022 election, the AMO Conference will provide one of the few remaining opportunities to connect directly with current and potential Provincial decision-makers on a number of key issues for the Region. Therefore, in addition to meeting with executive members of the Provincial Conservative Party, Niagara Region will also request meetings with the leaders of the Opposition to raise awareness of broad policy areas that require ongoing support from the government following the election.

Niagara Region will have two additional opportunities to raise awareness on key issues prior to the election: 1) during a proposed Fall virtual **Niagara Day(s)**; and 2) the **Rural Ontario Municipalities Association Conference** in January 2022.

Attendance at Municipal Delegations with Ministers

From Niagara Region's experience attending the 2020 AMO delegations, Councillor attendance during these virtual meetings with Ministers is relatively seamless so long as one of the two options for participating are met:

- Councillors would attend in-person at Regional Headquarters (limited capacity due to physical distancing requirements – 1 in-person Councillor per delegation meeting)
- Councillors attending a delegation meeting remotely are required to be registered AMO Conference attendees (Conference log-in information is necessary to access the Zoom platform)

Once scheduling information is made available from the Ministers Offices, staff will communicate meeting logistics to Conference-registered Councillors that have expressed an interest in one or more of the select advocacy issues. The Regional Chair's Office will invite expressions of interest to participate in delegations in late June.

Regional Councillors and staff attending delegations will receive a package containing briefing notes and other communications materials to prepare them for the meeting. Participants will also be invited to attend a webinar in the week prior to the Conference (August 9-13) to review the delegation materials and provide an opportunity to ask questions.

Alternatives Reviewed

Factors for determining the recommended AMO delegation issues

In addition to aligning issues with the priorities of the provincial government and the Region's Council Strategic Plan, the selection of proposed issues were based on following considerations:

- The issue is largely region-specific or are there other municipal organizations advocating on the same matter?
- Is the issue subject to a pending announcement between now and the Conference? Or is it anticipated that an announcement/updates related to the issue will be made during the Conference?
- Can other advocacy approaches be applied that would be more appropriate?
 - leveraging municipal or service associations on broader municipal issues, letter writing to raise awareness, connecting with senior public servants
- Is there potential for a partnership with the Province?

Summary of Proposed Delegations Issues

The proposed issues were identified through consultations with department senior leadership teams and subsequently confirmed by the corporate leadership team. These issues require immediate action to prevent further impacts on Regional operations and to expedite the progress of projects. Ongoing discussions are occurring on other Regional significant initiatives and is reason they may not be included. These conversations have or are being arranged independently from Conference (i.e. GO Transit extension, South Niagara Falls Waste Water Treatment Plant, etc.).

Recognizing that the region's local area municipalities will be undertaking their own delegations with provincial representatives and staff regarding their municipality's unique issues, the Region and 12 area municipalities are working together to ensure all of our respective issues are represented during the AMO delegations and that duplication or overlapping information is averted. Effective coordination is occurring to ensure unity on common issues, in part through joint delegations, that will demonstrate to the Province that our municipalities are collaborating effectively to build a stronger Niagara.

The number of delegation requests have been limited to six policy/projects areas to manage resources and minimize scheduling conflicts. In addition, the Province will only grant a municipality one meeting per Ministry. Generally the success rate for securing meetings with Ministers or their Parliamentary Assistants is 90-100%.

The following is the list of recommended advocacy issues discussion with Provincial Ministers:

1) Increasing Provincially Significant Employment Zones (PSEZ) in the Region (Minister of Economic Development)

Employment lands for manufacturing and heavy industry were established in Niagara in the 1960/70's. These areas no longer represent the location and infrastructure requirements needed to attract investment in new and expanding industries.

Employment land in the GTA is at a premium and in short supply. Niagara Region is the only area in the Greater Golden Horseshoe that has the combination of land, access to a 400 series highway and 4 border crossings to the US. A PSEZ in the Gateway Economic Zone will provide, preserve and promote strategic locations for new investment, contribute to the economic growth of the GGH and job growth in the Region.

ASK: Niagara Region is requesting that the Province, including the Ministries of Economic Development and Municipal Affairs and Housing, work with the Region to amend the Provincial PSEZ Map to identify designations along the QEW corridor between Niagara Falls and Fort Erie in conjunction with the Gateway Economic Zone in Niagara Region.

2) Ontario Marine Waterways Strategy to support the Marine sector (Minister of Transportation)

Currently, Niagara Region is not realizing the full economic potential of the Seaway because these assets have not been available. In addition, the manufacturing and service opportunities related to the maritime sector have largely been overlooked by the Province.

Niagara (and Ontario) is at competitive disadvantage as other Provinces with a Strategy are securing multi-billion dollar ship building and repair contracts from the Federal government while Ontario is disregarded albeit the Region has equal (if not more) capacity for the big contracts.

While other provinces have a Marine Strategy that has resulted in subsidies for this industry, there is no provincial strategy to support development in the maritime sector.

ASK: Requesting the Province develop an Ontario Marine Waterways Strategy that will generate more economic growth while ensuring Ontario remains competitive among its provincials and international counterparts

3) Critical Shortage of Registered Early Childhood Educators and previously forecasted funding reductions to municipalities for licensed childcare (Minister of Education)

The Region is currently experiencing a significant shortage of RECEs, which will only worsen without further planning to meet the demand that will be created through any expansion efforts. Competition with schools, and increasing requirements for formal education deters RECEs from accepting below living wage employment provided in licensed centres.

Without additional operational dollars to support service operators, Niagara Region anticipates that any expansion plans will not be feasible. The Province has indicated previously that there will be a reduction of funding to municipalities, which

will further strain the system but in the face of voiced commitments to expand the system funding will need to be enhanced rather than reduced.

ASK: Requesting the Ministry provide consistent, indexed funding to support competitive and appropriate wages to enable RECE recruitment and retention across the entire early years and child care system in Ontario

ASK: Maintain operational funding at 2021 levels at minimum to ensure the sustainability of service operators

ASK: Request that the Province include municipal partners (and specifically Niagara given the critical need for affordable childcare to support its post pandemic economic recovery) in its planning for the negotiations with the federal government regarding the proposed national childcare program and associated funding

4) Operational Funding for Bridge Housing Project (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing)

With the support of Provincial COVID Social Services Relief Funding, the Region dedicated funds to the capital costs of a Bridge Housing Project and a second supportive housing facility. In order to ensure the success of these initiatives, operating funding is required to sustain it.

ASK: Further to last year's meeting with the Minister, Niagara is requesting operational funds to support the Region's Bridge Housing Project and new supportive housing facility.

5) Niagara Long-term Care Redevelopment Projects – Update (Minister of Long-Term Care)

The long-term redevelopment projects of Linhaven and Gilmore Lodge are meeting the changing needs of residents in long-term care by balancing resident safety while enhancing residents' quality of life. These redevelopment projects are applying the WELL Building Standard™, the premier standard for buildings that support and advance human health and wellness.

ACTION: Extend a thank you for the capital investment received from the Province for these redevelopment projects

ACTION: Provide an update on the progress, milestones and future timelines of these projects

6) Modernization of emergency services dispatch (Solicitor General)

Emergency services in Niagara currently operate on a fragmented voice radio system that includes a provincial analogue system for EMS (in the process of being updated to a new digital platform – PSRN), a local digital systems used by Niagara police and half of the 12 local fire services and the other half (6) of our local fire services operating on an aging analogue system – what this means is that EMS, police, and fire are currently unable to easily communicate with each other which is not optimal for interoperability of emergency services.

ASK: The 6 remaining fire services operating on analogue will need to transition to the digital system; however it requires a capital investment of new hardware (radios) that is unaffordable to these municipalities. Requesting capital investments for this digital technology to ensure the seamless operation of all emergency service voice radio systems.

ASK: The complete integration of the Provincial Safety Radio Network (PSRN) used by EMS with the local digital voice radio system used by local police and fire agencies. Niagara is prepared to be an early adopter of this model to assist the Province in broader implementation.

The following list of suggested advocacy issues for discussion with Party Leaders include:

1. Expansion of Broadband Infrastructure and Capacity
2. Increasingly the supply of Affordable Housing
3. GO Train Service Expansion
4. Infrastructure funding support for the South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant
5. Connective Transportation Initiatives – North-South Escarpment Crossing/East-West Corridor

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The recommendations contained in this report directly support Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Priorities by advancing the following strategic objectives:

Supporting Business and Economic Growth

Objective 1.1: Economic Growth and Development

Objective 1.4 Strategically Target Industry Sectors

Healthy and Vibrant Community

Objective 2.1: Enhance Community Wellbeing

Objective 2.3: Addressing Affordable Housing Needs

Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning

Objective 3.1: Advancing Regional Transit and GO Rail Services

Objective 3.2: Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship

Objective 3.3: Maintain Existing Infrastructure

Objective 3.4: Facilitating the Movement of People and Goods

Sustainable and Engaging Government

Objective 4.1 High Quality, Efficient and Coordinated Core Services

Objective 4.2: Enhanced Communication

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