
Subject: AMO Conference 2021 - Overview

Report to: Regional Council

Report date: Thursday, September 23, 2021

Recommendations

1. That Report CAO 18-2021 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to share highlights of the 2021 Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference and provide an overview and results of the delegations with provincial members of parliament and Regional representatives
- The Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference was held virtually between August 15 to 19, 2021
- The Conference provided Regional Councillors and senior staff the opportunity to attend learning sessions on a variety of relevant municipal issues and to meet 1:1 virtually with provincial members of parliament on regional issues
- Regional representatives participated in 9 delegation meetings with Ministers, Parliamentary Assistants, and Opposition Leaders

Financial Considerations

Six (6) Regional Councillors, (Campion, Darte, Fertich, Foster, Huson, and Sendzik) and three (3) staff (Ron Tripp, Natalie Early, Gina van den Burg) were registered for the Conference at a total cost of \$6,271. These costs were allocated from individual Councillors expenses and department conference budgets.

Since the conference was held virtually, there were no costs related to travel.

Analysis

The City of London hosted AMO's second virtual Conference and showcased virtual study tours and London artists and performers.

More than 1,500 municipal leaders, government officials, public servants, sponsors, exhibitors, and media gathered virtually over three days of packed programming.

The Conference featured more than 40 speakers, sessions and workshops, reflecting the broad scope of municipal responsibilities. Sessions and speakers covered a wide range of topics, including COVID-19, its impact on municipal service delivery and charting economic recovery; climate change; women in leadership; broadband connectivity in Ontario; transforming long-term care; community paramedicine; diversity, bias, inclusivity and mental health; municipal insurance costs; property assessment in a post-pandemic world; changes to Conservation Authorities.

More than 400 delegation meetings and three (3) Ministers' Forums provided a direct dialogue with government that will continue throughout the year. More than \$400 million in additional provincial funding for housing and homelessness, public health and municipal modernization was announced. Stable OMPF funding for 2022 was confirmed. Additional details on the Conference events are provided in Appendix A.

Next year's AMO Conference is anticipated to be an in-person event in Ottawa between Sunday, August 14 and Wednesday, August 17, 2022.

Political Leaders' Addresses

Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario

Mr. Ford outlined the various fiscal supports provided to municipalities to help in the recovery of the COVID pandemic. He noted investments to increase direct care hours provided by allied health professionals such as physiotherapists and social workers by 20% over two years. In addition, Premier Ford announced that the Province will hire more than 27,000 new nurses and personal support workers, while investing \$4.9 billion over four years to make this happen.

He noted the Province is partnering with the federal government to provide up to \$2.15 billion in funding to assist Ontario municipal transit systems with COVID-19-related pressures and providing up to \$44 million to deliver local and intercommunity transportation projects in 38 underserved municipalities across Ontario. Furthermore, the Ontario Government is moving forward with two-way, all-day service every 15 minutes on core segments of the GO Transit rail network.

Premier Ford also reiterated his government's commitment to investing nearly \$4 billion dollars to connect every Ontarian in unserved and underserved parts of the province by the end of 2025.

Hon. Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steve Clark addressed delegates and announced that the Ontario Government will provide an additional \$307 million to municipalities and Indigenous partners to support critical services, protect homeless shelter staff and residents, and support affordable housing. Minister Clark also said that municipalities would get at least \$50 million more for modernization initiatives.

Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health

Minister of Health, Christine Elliott, committed to providing \$47 million in additional mitigation funding for public health units in 2022. As the pandemic continues, this continued funding will support public health in mitigating the provincial funding formula changes done in 2020.

Andrea Horwath, Leader of the NDP

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath focused on the need for infrastructure renewal and broadband expansion to support economic recovery and thanked municipalities for their "determination, dedication and steady hands" during the pandemic.

Steven Del Duca, Leader of the Liberal Party

Mr. Del Duca highlighted the issues that had emerged from the long-term care crisis during the pandemic and how private care homes failed their residents. He recognized that the lockdowns favoured big retailers, while making other smaller retailers suffer. In order to support community sustainability, Mr. Del Duca noted the Province needs to redesign the fiscal architecture of the country to improve the funding structure for infrastructure. He suggests this can be achieved by potentially providing a share of existing HST revenue to municipalities.

Mike Schreiner, Leader of the Green Party

His remarks focused on how the Ontario Greens plan to work with municipalities as a partner to build livable and affordable communities that work for people and the planet. Schreiner detailed that the Ontario Greens are committed to provincially funding 50% of all shelter and community housing costs as well as 50% of all transit operating costs. Schreiner also highlighted the importance of providing municipalities with funding for infrastructure climate adaptation and emphasized the economic potential of the green economy to “kickstart the economy with new careers and good, clean jobs.”

Regional Delegations with Provincial Members of Parliament

A full description of the issues presented in the delegations are provided in Appendix B.

Modernization of Emergency Services Communication Systems

Solicitor General Sylvia Jones was pleased that Niagara Region and its local municipalities were collaborating on the integration emergency communications across the Region. She noted that the Province is actively working to invest in the next generation of emergency coverage through the NG911 system. The Province’s focus is to ensure this coverage is completed and is working across multiple ministries and Infrastructure Ontario to ensure all services are connected. Therefore, until the infrastructure is in place to connect all areas with NG911, there will not be a purchase program available for municipalities to leverage for hardware. Nevertheless, Minister Jones committed that she will consider a reimbursement program for hardware once NG911 has been implemented.

Long-term Care Redevelopment Projects

The Minister of Long-term Care, Hon. Rod Phillips, was pleased to receive an update on Niagara Region’s new long-term care redevelopment projects. He commended the Region for its innovative approach in the creation of a Community Wellness Hub that will offer various programs for all seniors in the community. He appreciated the concept that these facilities will become more than a home by also being attractive for seniors to visit. Minister Phillips was interested to learn more about how the Community Wellness Hub would be operationalized as well as how the application of built in PPE storage can be applied to other new redevelopment projects. The meeting concluded with the Minister’s desire to attend the ground-breaking ceremonies of the two redevelopment projects.

Homelessness Service Offerings in Niagara

Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, congratulated the Region for being champions on the Build for Zero and By-Name List. He appreciated the opportunity to attend the opening of the new Bridge Housing Project and is very pleased with its success. Minister Clark noted that the Ministry will be undertaking consultations regarding supportive housing and recognizes the costs to operate. Although he could not provide a clear indication on the Province's next steps on the Region's support bridge housing project, Minister Clark committed to working with his colleagues to help move this project forward. When asked about the timing for announcements on CHPI or supportive housing funding, he indicated that he is continuing to renegotiate these funds, but could not guarantee that there will be significant adjustments.

Shortage of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs)

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, was interested to learn what components would be included in a proposed retention strategy for RECEs and what would be considered adequate and equitable compensation. Mr. Oosterhoff acknowledged the regulatory burdens placed on licensed home daycares particularly as many regulations do not apply to these care-settings. He noted that more can be done by the Province to reduce the reporting requirements and will be exploring the reduction of red tape for licensed home day cares in order to encourage unlicensed daycares to join the system.

Increasing Employment Lands

During the Province's call to municipalities last year seeking large tracts of land for manufacturing, the Hon. Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade (MEDJCT), acknowledged the shortage of large tracts of employment land that became apparent during the Province's launch of the Job Opportunities Fund, which did not qualify Niagara Region. He noted that the Region's request to increase its employment lands is timely as the Province is in the process of designing another program similar to the Job Opportunities Fund. Niagara Region will work with the Ministry of the Municipal Affairs and Housing and the MEDJCT to help shape the forthcoming new Provincial program and adjust the respective planning maps as needed.

North-South Niagara Escarpment Crossing – Joint West Niagara Delegation

The Province is undertaking consultations for the purposes of developing a Ontario Transportation Plan to 2051. The Hon. Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation, noted that consultations with stakeholders related to the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA) will be lengthier and more rigorous than other areas of the Province. With the release of the discussion paper, Minister Mulroney was adamant that the opportunity to include the North-South Niagara Escarpment Crossing has not been finalized and that the Province will continue to engage with Niagara on incorporating this infrastructure project into the Plan. She highlighted that the Province is conducting a Roundtable Discussion on the needs of the Region and an opportunity for stakeholders to submit a detailed response via the Province's Environmental Registry. In addition, a Provincial Task Force will be created to provide guidance on the short and long-term projects that should be included in the final Plan. Once details on the Task Force are available, Minister Mulroney's staff will reach out to Niagara Region.

Opposition Leaders and Community Building

Niagara Region representatives met with each of the Provincial Opposition Parties to outline its key infrastructure priorities that included Broadband and cellular connectivity; GO Transit Services; Affordable Housing; Niagara-Hamilton Transportation infrastructure; and South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant. Steven Del Duca appreciated Niagara Region sharing its infrastructure needs, while Jeff Burch, MPP for Niagara Centre, on behalf of Andrea Horwath, outlined the NDP's 2018 Platform for funding provincial infrastructure and how it aligned with the needs of Niagara Region. Particular support from the NDP would be in the area of boosting housing supply supports.

Green Party Leader, Mike Schreiner, provided insights into the Party's direction on Region infrastructure projects. The Party is seeking more input on broadband and its challenges as well as other infrastructure areas where the government needs to be pushed. He noted that it is the Party's focus to address transit and shelter demands with an understanding that it is essential to municipalities to have the Province take pressure off the property tax base, which has not been discussed with Provincial leaders yet. Party staff will be requesting the Region's perspective on its housing platform. The Green Party Leader expressed his commitment to investments in Climate Change adaptation and storm water management. Mr. Schreiner outlined his Party's work with Conservation Ontario to improve environmental regulations to ensure they still allowed

Conservation Authorities to protect the environment as much as possible. The Party will be seeking input on Conservation Authorities and the impact on new regulations.

Marine Strategy

A request was made to the Hon. Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation, regarding the development of an Ontario Marine Strategy. As a result of a number of consultations and advocacy initiatives that were in progress with other Niagara region industry stakeholders, the Region's request for a meeting was declined.

Complementing the advocacy work from industry stakeholders was the success of a number of Niagara's local area municipalities that had the opportunity to meet with the Minister during the Conference on other subjects and leveraged this occasion to discuss the important need for this economic strategy. Niagara Region will continue to collaborate with its partners and advocate to the Province to move this initiative forward.

Appointment of Meeting Delegates

Details regarding logistics and planning for the AMO Conference was shared with Regional Council at the May 20th Council meeting. The report invited registered Councillors that had an interest in any of the issues to contact the Chair's Office to participate. The Chair's Office did not receive any requests. In order to ensure a coordinated presentation of the issues in a very short 15 minute time period, the selection of Regional Councillors for speaking roles was limited to two Councillors (in addition to the Chair). Any other Councillors interested in attending would participate as observers. The names of selected Regional delegates (as per the criteria below) are then submitted to the Ministers Office months in advance of the Conference. The two (2) Councillors are selected on the basis of:

- 1) Registered for the AMO Conference in order to gain access to the delegation portal
- 2) The issue directly impacts their community/municipality
- 3) They possess unique/specialized knowledge of the issue (i.e. Chair of an Advisory Body that relates to the issues)
- 4) Priority is also granted to Heads of Local Councils in their role as spokespersons for their municipality

Should the Head of the Local Council be unavailable, a request is extended to a Regional Councillor from that municipality to substitute.

Ultimately, the AMO delegations are tightly controlled by the Minister's Office and without having a solid list of Regional Councillors provided to their Office in advance, they will not permit unlisted attendees access to the delegation. Room capacity restrictions for a potential in-person meeting at the 2022 AMO Conference is expected to remain and consideration of limiting the number of Regional delegates for meetings would be required.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The initiatives outlined 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

Other Pertinent Reports

- CAO 9-2021 - Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) 2021 Annual Conference
- CWCD 2021–193 – Memorandum from Ron Tripp, Acting Chief Administrative Officer, respecting Niagara Region’s Submission to Ministry of Transportation on the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan 2051

Submitted by:

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This report was prepared by Gina van den Burg, Government & Stakeholder Relations Specialist, in consultation with Natalie Early, Director, Corporate Strategy and Innovations and Daryl Barnhart, Executive Officer to the Regional Chair.

Appendices

Appendix A AMO 2021 Conference Program

Appendix B Delegation Meetings with Provincial Members of Parliament