



**SUBJECT: Highlights from Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) virtual conference 2021**

**TO: Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability Cttee.**

**FROM: Office of the Mayor**

Report Number: MO-03-21

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 120-01

Date to Committee: March 3, 2021

Date to Council: March 23, 2021

---

### **Recommendation:**

Receive and file office of the Mayor report MO-03-21 providing an update on the Mayor and Council members' attendance at the annual Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) virtual conference that took place on January 25 and January 26, 2021.

### **PURPOSE:**

#### **Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Increase economic prosperity and community responsive city growth
- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment
- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation

---

### **Background and Discussion:**

Burlington has the best of both urban and rural living. We are a large urban municipality, with a seat at the Ontario Big City Mayors (OBCM) caucus and through the Mayor's participation on the Large Urban Caucus of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO). At the same time, half of our land mass is also rural, with thriving rural and

agricultural communities in Ward 1, Ward 3 and Ward 6. The issues faced by our rural residents are similar to those faced by exclusively rural communities across Ontario.

The Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) is the rural municipal voice of the province. ROMA promotes, supports and enhances strong and effective rural governments. About 270 of Ontario's 444 municipalities have populations of less than 10,000 while scores more are rural in character. As the rural arm of AMO, ROMA advocates for policies and programs that will help build thriving rural Ontario communities.

The annual ROMA conference remains an opportunity to connect with colleagues and the province and learn from experts on important and timely rural issues. This year the conference took place virtually January 25-26. More than 1,100 participants took part, virtually, in the first large gathering of municipal officials in Ontario since the pandemic entered its second wave.

More information about the conference is available here:

<https://www.roma.on.ca/Events/2021ROMAConference.aspx>.

At this year's event we heard from the Premier of Ontario, key ministers and opposition leaders. ROMA's board also elected a new executive for the next two years, including Chair Robin Jones, Mayor of the Village of Westport, First Vice Chair Kevin Holland, Mayor of the Township of Conmee and Second Vice Chair Eli El-Chantiry, Ottawa City Councillor. The conference provided an opportunity to attend workshops, keynote sessions and directly engage with provincial ministers.

Some highlights are as follows:

### **Speakers:**

One of the keynote speakers was political commentator and national affairs writer Chantal Hébert. Her key messages were as follows:

- The public generally supports more action and restrictions, and believes controlling the pandemic has to come before the economy. The Premiers that have been most reluctant to shut down the economy have also collected the lowest approval ratings. The reverse is also true.
- Governments can't impose restrictions without support, and government aid at all levels to businesses, individuals and municipalities has been well-received.
- The key issues that have emerged for immediate attention during and post-pandemic, that have gone from back-burner to front-burner, are fixing long term care and advancing rural broadband across the country.
- COVID-19 is a public health crisis but will leave a legacy of mental health and economic impacts that will take decades to resolve.

- The public expects governments at all levels to work together and put partisanship aside; that has occurred.
- It is expected that we will have a federal election next spring or summer. Next fall will make 24 months of this government; minority governments have typically lasted 18-24 months.

Daily summaries of speakers and announcements can be found on the ROMA conference site here (Scroll to News Releases):

<https://www.roma.on.ca/Events/2021ROMAConference.aspx>.

### **Delegations:**

Mayor Meed Ward participated in both Regional and City delegations with provincial ministers on a variety of issues. Councillor Nisan participated in City delegations, as a rural councillor and representative on board of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM).

### **Regional Delegations:**

The Regional advocacy document is attached as Appendix A. The full list of regional delegations is attached as Appendix B.

The elected officials from the Region at each meeting included Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr, Milton Regional Councillor/Chair of the Regional Caucus at AMO, Colin Best, and Mayor Meed Ward. Local Halton MPPs attended most of the meetings also.

New items to note from the meetings:

- We asked for Minister of Transportation Caroline Mulroney's assistance in fighting the CN Intermodal Hub in Milton.
- We received an update from Minister of Health Christine Elliott on vaccine distribution. Unlike other provinces, Ontario has held back half the doses to ensure the ability to provide the second dose. This has meant that despite recent vaccines shortages, the province will be able to administer the second dose to those who have been vaccinated, within 42 days (the limit).
- We spoke with Minister of Education Stephen Lecce and advocated for the safe reopening of Halton schools as soon as possible.

### **City Delegations:**

Mayor Meed Ward and Councillor Nisan also attended two City delegations as follows.

1. Honorable Jeff Yurek, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

- Hassaan Basit, President and CEO of Conservation Halton, as well as Burlington MPP Jane McKenna also attended this delegation.

- In this delegation, we updated the Minister on our private tree bylaw, upcoming Parks Master Plan review, Climate Emergency Declaration and related initiatives arising from that. He asked us to forward him a copy of those plans, especially the Climate Emergency, as he has collected those from across the province.
- Re: changes to Conservation Authorities (CAs) - we asked for local autonomy to determine governance and board composition, levies and MOUs for municipalities (and more time to craft these) and taking a watershed approach to CA planning.

## 2. Honorable Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure

- The need for stable infrastructure funding from the province was discussed, as growth does not pay for growth; infill residential projects, which are the majority of Burlington's new growth, are more complicated and costly than greenfield.
- There is a need for rural broadband as an essential infrastructure. It's becoming just as important as heat and lighting in a home. Minister Scott suggested we also engage in advocacy at the federal government level for additional funding. Ontario has committed \$1 billion; the federal government has committed \$1.7 billion nationwide, which will not be sufficient. Mayor Meed Ward will work with the three councillors with rural constituencies to bring something forward.
- Minister Scott was updated on planned advocacy from TAPMO on fairness for municipalities with aggregate operations (see Appendix C for TAPMO's winter meeting agenda).
- In the Regional meeting with Minister's Scott's Parliamentary Assistant, MPP Stephen Crawford, Mayor Meed Ward said funding for Skyway Community Centre is a top priority for Burlington Council for the next intake for provincial funding.

### **Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario (TAPMO)**

Burlington has a seat around the TAPMO table by virtue of having two quarries in our jurisdiction: Aldershot (Ward 1) [<http://aldershotquarry.ca/>] and Nelson Aggregate - Burlington Quarry (Ward 3) [<https://www.nelsonaggregate.com/burlington>].

The Chair of TAPMO is Sue Foxton, Mayor of the Township of North Dumfries, so information about TAPMO is hosted on the township's website here:

<https://www.northdumfries.ca/en/township-services/top-aggregate-producing-municipalities-of-ontario-tapmo.aspx#>.

Annually, TAPMO schedules a board meeting in conjunction with the ROMA conference. This year, that meeting took place on Sunday, January 24. This was the first TAPMO meeting Mayor Meed Ward has had an opportunity to attend.

Though generally supportive of aggregate operations, TAPMO is the voice for municipalities to ensure these operations are sustainable and pay their fair share.

The focus of the recent meeting was the need for advocacy to provincial agencies for fairness around:

- Property taxes paid by aggregate operations which are currently rated as less than farmland.
- Infrastructure contributions to reflect costs of infrastructure (such as roads) to support aggregate operations.
- Other matters.

The TAPMO members agreed to engage a government relations company to assist in advocacy over the next year. In February, the TAPMO board will meet to discuss a business plan, and a formula for contributions from municipalities to fund this advocacy, which is expected to start this spring and last for the better part of 2021.

Halton Regional Councillor Colin Best and Mayor Meed Ward agreed to take the request for funding to both our city and regional tables to participate in this important work. The Mayor will also work closely with the Ward 1 and 3 councillors who host aggregate operations.

The agenda and minutes of TAPMO are attached as Appendix C.

---

## **Financial Matters:**

### **Total Financial Impact**

The cost of the Mayor's attendance at the virtual event was a \$400 registration fee as per previous report MO-02-21.

---

## **Climate Implications**

N/A

---

## **Engagement Matters:**

N/A

---

## **Conclusion:**

Receive and file this report.

---

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Marianne Meed Ward

**Appendices:** (if none delete section)

- A. ROMA handout prepared by Halton Region for delegation meetings
- B. List of delegation meetings with Halton Region
- C. TAPMO agenda

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.