



SUBJECT: Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) 2021 conference highlights

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

FROM: Office of the Mayor

Report Number: MO-05-21

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 120-01

Date to Committee: September 9, 2021

Date to Council: September 21, 2021

Recommendation:

Receive and file office of the mayor report MO-05-21 providing highlights of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario 2021 virtual conference.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Increase economic prosperity and community responsive city growth
 - Improve integrated city mobility
 - 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
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Background and Discussion:

From August 15th to 19th, 2021, the Mayor, City Councillors Nisan, Kearns and Bentivegna, and select staff members from the City of Burlington attended the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) annual conference. This year's event was held virtually, similar to last year, as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Being present and engaged at this event provides our leadership team with opportunities to network and partner with municipal peers on shared issues and ideas, to attend learning sessions on a variety of relevant municipal issues, and to meet 1:1

with provincial members of parliament on local issues. It is also an opportunity to connect with each provincial party leader to share issues that are of importance to the people of Burlington and ask about the way they intend to work with municipalities if elected in the 2022 election.

Key highlights of the sessions attended by the Mayor and team include the following:

PRE- CONFERENCE MEETINGS:

Sunday August 15th:

AMO Large Urban Caucus Board of Directors Meeting

The mayor is a member of the Large Urban Caucus of AMO, a role that provides opportunity to submit ideas for discussion from the urban perspective to the full AMO board for advocacy. Topics discussed at this year's board meeting included municipal financial sustainability, funding for rural broadband, climate change, infrastructure, public health, paramedics, long-term care, Indigenous relations, policing, waste diversion and insurance. A more fulsome review of key points can be viewed in Appendix D of this report.

TAPMO Annual General Meeting

The mayor represents Burlington on TAPMO (Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario) given our city has two active quarries: Nelson and Aldershot.

TAPMO represents local Municipalities across Ontario, including Halton Region, that have significant reserves and annual production of aggregate, stone and sand materials. Their membership shares the perspective that local municipalities have a vital role to play in ensuring a sustainable aggregate industry for Ontario. In addition, TAPMO members believe the aggregate industry should pay their fair share of municipal property taxes and be classed as profitable businesses rather than as farm.

The current farm classification has cost municipalities millions of dollars in lost revenue, for which taxpayers have picked up the tax, effectively resulting in Burlington taxpayers subsidizing the aggregate industry. At our January board meeting, TAPMO approved hiring Upstream Strategy Group to conduct their advocacy strategy and initiative with the Provincial Government to correct the tax classification. Individual meetings are also being arranged between Upstream, the mayor and MPPs in each of the aggregate-producing municipalities. Our meeting for Burlington is currently being scheduled.

TAPMO is requesting financial support from member municipalities in 2021 for this advocacy work.

Halton Regional Council has already supported this priority and directed staff to contribute to this advocacy effort through the approval of the contribution of \$2,100 from

the Council-approved operating budget to TAPMO. The Regional resolution requested Halton municipalities to also independently support the advocacy work around the change in tax classification, so the mayor will work with the two councillors (Bentivegna and Nisan) who represent rural Burlington to bring something forward in early fall, including, if applicable, a funding request.

MAIN CONFERENCE PROGRAM:

Monday August 16th:

AMO's Media Release with their take on the day's highlights can be found [here](#).

AMO Welcome and Keynote Session

After a stirring rendition of O Canada, an energetic welcome from Mayor Ed Holder of London (this year's virtual host city), some very inspiring and informative words from local Indigenous community leaders and a moving poem about the COVID-19 pandemic, we heard from keynote speaker Sheila Watt-Cloutier (a Nobel peace prize nominee) who is an environmental, cultural and human rights advocate as she discussed the social, cultural and economic impacts of climate change.

AMO President and Annual General Meeting

AMO President Graydon Smith, mayor of Bracebridge, spoke to the group about truth and reconciliation for the Indigenous community and provided a land acknowledgement for the event. He spoke about the very real issue of racism including the tragic loss of life in London, Ontario as a result of Islamophobia. He also spoke about democracy and how important it is to engage all voices in our political processes and how AMO will support the next municipal elections including educational outreach in our communities.

The Annual General Meeting then began with the Secretary-Treasurers financial report and reminded us of the 420 members of AMO in 2020 from across the province and spoke about the Community Building Fund (formerly known as the Gas Tax fund).

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Steve Clark, then spoke about recovering from COVID-19 through unity, thanking Graydon Smith for his leadership as AMO President, and all the AMO staff for their work in organizing this event, announced additional funding for municipalities via a third intake for the Audit and Accountability Fund (of which Burlington has previously partaken), and spoke about strengthening accountability for municipal council members. He also once again signed AMO's Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Ontario (first signed in 2001 and up for renewal this year).

Speaker: The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario

Premier Ford spoke about the ongoing pandemic response and expressed a great deal of appreciation for the role municipal leaders have played in keeping their communities safe.

Federal Gas Tax / Canada Community Building Fund session:

AMO administers the Canada Community Building Fund (formerly known as Gas Tax fund) to 443 municipalities in Ontario.

Canadian municipalities receive over \$2 billion from the Canada Community-Building Fund each year; Ontario's share is over \$800 million. Funds are distributed to communities across the province on a per-capita basis.

Since its launch in 2005, municipalities receiving Canada Community-Building funds through AMO have invested nearly \$7.0 billion from the Fund into about 9,750 local projects. Funds can be invested across 18 project categories to promote economic growth, strengthen communities, and improve the environment.

This session congratulated the City of London on their Organic Rank and Cycle (ORC) system implementation that turns the heat generated by burning sewage sludge into energy, a benefit for the environment as well as their bottom line, and the first of its kind in Canada.

Buildingcommunities.ca is an AMO online resource on current projects across Ontario that are taking place as a result of this funding.

Speaker: The Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier

Minister Elliott discussed the ongoing pandemic response, vaccine distribution and uptake, and health-related funding from the provincial government including \$47 million in one-time funding for health units in 2022.

Minister's Forum: Strengthening Community Well-Being with Health, Social Services and Education

Moderated by TVO's John Michael McGrath, this session included 10 Ministers (Elliott, Jones, Lecce, Dunlop, Fullerton, Gill, Cho, Phillips, Tibollo, and McKenna) answering questions from the crowd of attendees.

Discussion related to topics including (but not limited to) the delivery and leadership of health services and their deployment, supportive housing and treatment of addictions particularly in Northern Ontario, safe and affordable post-secondary student housing, and long-term care standards and improvements.

Tuesday August 17th:

AMO's Media Release with their take on the day's highlights can be found [here](#).

AMO Women's Leadership Forum

This forum was moderated by Nam Kiwanuka, host of TVO's The Agenda in the Summer, and explored the perspectives and insights of women in public office in Canada. Panelists included:

- The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario
- The Honourable Jean Augustine, P.C., C.M., O.Ont, C.B.E., a Grenadian-Canadian educationalist, social advocate and politician, and the first Black Canadian woman to serve as a federal Minister of the Crown and Member of Parliament.
- Elizabeth May, who served as Leader of the Green Party of Canada from 2006 to 2019 and is the Member of Parliament for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The session covered many timely topics such as what each woman has learned about herself through the pandemic (surviving in a small space throughout lockdown, befriending technology, and appreciating the generosity of friends and neighbours), and learnings they noticed such as how all levels of government came together for a common purpose in a way never seen before, as well as shortcomings in connectivity, work inequalities, and long-term care standards.

Women's Networking Session

The Women's Networking Session, hosted by Burlington MPP, The Hon. Jane McKenna, Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, brought together elected officials from across the province to share experiences and ideas.

Some interesting resources and information were shared by participants in this valuable chat experience such as:

- In Waterloo Region, the municipal campaign school has been running for years and has really helped many women decide to run, or to work out how to support another woman who is running. www.learnhowtorun.com
- ElectHERnow.ca is a group of women working to achieve gender balance of elected municipal officials, started by elected representatives and community volunteers in Grey and Bruce Counties. Resources are available to anyone who wishes to run for office.
- Inspired by this Networking Session at last year's AMO Conference, the women on Council joined forces to create the [Town of Cobourg's Women in Governance Program](#). They mentor women in their community who are interested in running for elected office and host terrific guest speakers: Provincial Minister Jill Dunlop,

Federal Minister Maryam Monsef, Senator Yonah Martin, and Former Premier Kathleen Wynne. This program could be adapted for other municipalities! For more information, email echorley@cobourg.ca.

- In Middlesex County, has almost reached parity on their council with 5 of 11 Council members who are women. Last year, they created the Women's Caucus of Middlesex County Council and have spent their time focusing on issues impacting women and families across their County and giving them a voice. If anyone is interested about creating a Women's Caucus, or simply talking about your own experiences, reach out to womenscaucus@middlesex.ca

Keynote Session: André Picard

André Picard is an award-winning national health writer and author and focused his presentation on how the pandemic will impact public health, long-term care and more.

He spoke in a hopeful tone about the opportunities COVID-19 created for politicians to affect positive change going forward, especially as it refers to mitigating inequalities. He also cautioned us to watch for likely budget cuts in the coming years, especially at the provincial level, due to the deficit that has amassed because of this pandemic and to ensure they do not affect our essential healthcare system.

Speaker: Andrea Horwath, Leader of the Official Opposition and Ontario NDP

This session was an opportunity for Andrea Horwath to share NDP party priorities with the group, including their push for more emergency provincial funding for municipalities, increasing the community infrastructure fund, supporting rural broadband access, investing in better ventilation in our schools and recovering from the pandemic.

FCM President, Joanne Vanderheyden

Joanne spoke to the importance of municipalities role as the closest level of government in our communities and how – especially with the upcoming federal election - we expect upper levels of government to commit to working closely with us on issues such as climate mitigation, affordable housing, investing in core infrastructure and public transit. FCM will be proposing that the Canada Community Building fund get permanently doubled to create more growth and jobs in the years ahead.

AMO Honour Roll Award

The AMO Honour Roll recognizes those who have gone beyond their normal roles and responsibilities and made a significant impact in the service of their communities. This year's recipient was [Susan Gardner of Municipal World](#). She was honoured for the positive impact her innovative work has on public officials and our communities.

Ministers' Forum: Economic Recovery and Growth in Ontario

John Michael McGrath of TVO moderated today's session on the theme of economic recovery and growth and included Ministers Bethlenfalvy, Fedeli, Romano, Sarkaria, Tangri, Rasheed and Clark and Attorney General Downey.

Topics discussed included homelessness, housing and addictions (and how they interrelate), fixing the MPAC assessment system, and municipal insurance costs and settlements.

Wednesday August 18th:

Keynote Session: Anthony McLean

Anthony McLean focused this keynote on issue of diversity, bias, inclusivity and mental health and how they have all been brought into clearer focus by the events of 2020. He spoke movingly about his experience growing up with racism in Ontario and shared some illuminating examples of unconscious bias that I think we all learned from.

Speaker: Steven Del Duca, Leader Ontario Liberal Party

In this session Ontario Liberal Party Leader Del Duca shared his party's priorities with AMO attendees.

Panel: Path to Economic Recovery

Moderated again this year by Steve Paikin, host of TVO's The Agenda with Steve Paikin, this panel explored the most up-to-date thinking and intelligence on how business and economic recovery will unfold in Ontario including the following panelists:

- The Honorable Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance will share his perspectives and insights from his front row seat in Ontario's economic policy.
- Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers, Armine Yalnizyan, joins the panel for 2021 with important perspectives on the future of employment and economic participation.
- Diane J. Brisebois, President and CEO of the Retail Council of Canada returns to the 2021 panel with perspectives on what conditions will be required to help ensure the recovery of Ontario's retail industry and, in turn, Ontario's economy.

The session was a spirited debate with insightful points made by all panelists on issues such as affordable childcare, safe schools in the era of COVID-19, the struggles that

non-essential retailers continue to face, paid sick days, job flexibility, and watching debt levels and how they will ultimately impact the cost of doing business.

Speaker: Mike Schreiner, Leader of the Green Party of Ontario

In this session Ontario Green Party Leader Schreiner shared his party's priorities with AMO attendees.

Speaker: The Honourable Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure

In her address to the crowd, Minister Surma talked about too many Ontarians not having broadband access and said that the provincial government is making the largest single investment in high-speed internet, in any province, by any government in Canadian history. Her goal, and that of the Premier, is to have all of Ontario connected by the end of 2025.

Ministers' Forum: Looking Ahead on the Environment, Infrastructure and Resource Development Post-COVID

There were many questions from the delegates for this session and topics covered included broadband, support for farmers and the agriculture industry, intercommunity bussing, and better coordinating our efforts to mitigate climate change.

Woodland Cultural Centre: Virtual Tour of the Mohawk Institute Residential School

This was a timely and deeply moving experience. We were taken on a special virtual tour of the former Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School that ran for 142 years and only closed in 1970 and is now called the Woodland Cultural Centre – a place where a dark part of Canada's history is preserved and shared, and a way to honour the lived experiences of the children who went there.

Hearing the details of how the children were taken from their families, separated from siblings even once they arrived there, how they were treated poorly and often received corporal punishment and abuse, were malnourished, punished for speaking anything but English, and given a number instead of ever being called their given name was heartbreaking.

Listening to the stories of survivors and seeing first-hand the actual institute itself left many of us speechless. I know the information we learned will help us make more informed and better decisions as we seek to support Truth and Reconciliation as municipal leaders in our communities.

AMO's media release recapping the final day's events can be found [here](#).

DELEGATION MEETINGS

A key benefit of the AMO conference each year is the opportunity to request meetings with provincial ministers to press the priorities of the City of Burlington. This year, I had the opportunity to participate in delegations for the City of Burlington, Region of Halton, and Ontario Big City Mayor's caucus.

AMO also provides for the opportunity to meet with all party leaders, which we did.

Highlights of our delegations are below.

Ontario Big City Mayors Delegations

Minister of Health, Christine Elliott and Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Michael Tibollo

As a member of Ontario Big City Mayors (OBCM), I was invited to attend this delegation and speak to growing mental health issues we are seeing in Ontario in my capacity as co-chair of the OBCM working group on mental health and addictions, alongside co-chair Darrin Canniff, Mayor of Chatham Kent. During the delegation we had an opportunity to present the highlights of our working group's policy paper, endorsed by OBCM. Read OBCM's [Mental Health Working Group paper](#) here.

Minister of Infrastructure Kinga Surma

This meeting was chaired by Guelph Mayor Cam Guthrie, and attended by myself, Cambridge Mayor Kathryn McGarry and Chatham-Kent Mayor Darrin Canniff. We discussed the need for a permanent infrastructure funding framework that provides municipalities with a steady flow of infrastructure dollars, cost-shared with the federal government, and a fair funding formula. OBCM asked the province to convene a working group to develop a set of criteria that considers the varying needs across municipalities to be used to dictate annual funding allocations.

Halton Region Delegations

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), Steve Clark

Minister of Long Term Care, Rod Phillips,

Minister of Health, Christine Elliott

Minister of Infrastructure, Kinga Surma

Parliamentary Assistant Randy Pettapiece, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

I was pleased to chair our regional delegation meetings on behalf Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr, alongside my colleagues Oakville Mayor Rob Burton, Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette, Milton Regional Councillor Colin Best, and regional staff Jane MacCaskill and Mabel Watt. Most of our area MPPs also attended the delegations.

Our Regional priorities conveyed to each of these ministries via presentation and key messages and asks are detailed in Appendices B and C of this report.

City of Burlington Delegations

All the presentations we shared via the Burlington Delegations can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Parliamentary Secretary, Jim McDonnell

This session enabled us to directly update Parliamentary Secretary McDonnell on our work on our affordable housing strategy, climate change actions, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and managing growth in Burlington, including our request for speedy approval of Regional Official Plan Amendment 48, which includes the adjusted boundaries of the Urban Growth Centre to the Burlington GO station area, once the comment period closes Sept. 8. We appreciated having MPP Jane McKenna join the delegation and were also joined by Ken Audziss from her team, and Burlington Ward 2 City Councillor Lisa Kearns.

Vincent Ke, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries

Our conversation with Parliamentary Assistant Ke focused on seeking funding for the Skyway Community Centre project, our top community funding priority. We discussed the project's energy-efficiency and inclusivity, and explained our desire to obtain additional funding from the province as we look to begin construction in 2022.

Minister of Infrastructure Kinga Surma

Our meeting with Minister Surma centered around two key topics:

- improving rural broadband access and gaining more clarity around how recently announced funding will impact specific Burlington neighborhoods
- Provincial funding for Skyway Community Centre project.

Councillors Nisan and Bentivegna, who represent the majority of Burlington's rural residents, also attended.

Party Leader Delegations

All the presentations we shared with party leaders can be found in Appendix A.

MPP Mike Schreiner, Leader of the Green Party of Ontario, Steven Del Duca, Leader Ontario Liberal Party, Andrea Horwath, New Democratic Party Leader

I was joined by Councillor Rory Nisan in our meetings with party leaders Schreiner and Del Duca to share Burlington's top priorities including managing growth, affordable housing, diversity and inclusion, the environment, and empowering municipalities through the Charter City initiative. Councillor Nisan also chaired a delegation meeting with Leader Andrea Horwath. MPP Horwath shared her priorities on issues such as housing affordability and environmental initiatives. MPP Schreiner shared his party's support affordable housing and Charter Cities. We also had a robust debate with Leader Del Duca on elimination of the Ontario Lands Tribunal as a way to save money and speed delivery of affordable housing, in keeping with [the unanimous resolution](#) passed by Halton Regional Council.

Burlington Delegation meetings were also attended by Tim Commisso, City Manager, Helen Walihura, Government Relations, and Victoria Langdon, Mayor's Chief of Staff.

Financial Matters:

The registration fee for AMO is \$678 per person.

The fee for all members of council who attended, including the mayor, was paid for via the Halton Region budget as per precedent in past years. The other members of council who attended this year include Councillors Kearns, Nisan, and Bentivegna.

The cost of one staff member attending alongside the mayor to provide administrative support and for their own professional development was also \$678, paid for via the Mayor's Office budget.

Since the conference was held virtually due to COVID-19, there were no costs related to travel.

Climate Implications

One of the advantages to a virtual conference is the lack of need to travel. By attending from home, we were able to avoid the climate implications of travelling to an in-person event.

Engagement Matters:

N/A

Conclusion:

The most noted value in this event was our opportunity to meet 1:1 with provincial members of parliament and share our local needs and priorities with them, along with our ability to connect with peers (although virtually) and share ideas, knowledge, and learnings with one another through many interactive sessions.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Marianne Meed Ward

Appendices:

- A. Presentations for all Burlington Delegation Meetings
- B. Presentation for Halton Region Delegations
- C. Halton Region Delegations - Key Points and Asks
- D. AMO Board of Directors Meeting Supplemental

Report Approval:

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