



SUBJECT: Highlights from Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) virtual conference 2022

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

FROM: Office of the Mayor

Report Number: MO-01-22

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 120-01

Date to Committee: March 2, 2022

Date to Council: March 22, 2022

Recommendation:

Receive and file office of the Mayor report MO-01-22 providing an update on the Mayor and staff members' attendance at the annual Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) virtual conference that took place between January 23 and 25, 2022.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Increase economic prosperity and community responsive city growth
- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment

Background and Discussion:

Mayor Meed Ward attended the ROMA conference again this year, joined by two additional city staff: Helen Walihura, Government Relations Manager, and Kelly Cook, Senior Planner and staff liaison to The Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee (BARAAC). Ward 6 Councillor Angelo Bentivegna also attended this year.

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 Mayor attends the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) annual conference each year to learn and share insights on how to support our rural residents here in Burlington. This year some of the key issues emerging that are relevant to Burlington are increasing rural broadband, supporting Indigenous residents in our communities, and supporting our agricultural economy. The Mayor also met with two provincial ministries to advance Burlington priorities, detailed below.

About ROMA 2022

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 key government partners and learn from experts on important and timely rural issues. Similar to last year, this year the conference took place virtually on January 23-25.

More information about the conference and the full program of speakers and events can be found here: <https://www.roma.on.ca/roma-2022-rural-opportunities/program>

At this year's event we again heard from the Premier of Ontario, key ministers and opposition leaders. The conference provided an opportunity to attend workshops, keynote sessions and directly engage with provincial ministers.

Highlights:

Some key highlights of this year's conference are below.

Speakers:

Chief Perry Bellegarde: The keynote speaker to kick off the first full day of the conference was Chief Perry Bellegarde, Former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. Chief Bellegarde spoke passionately about the fact that many Canadians don't know our own history with indigenous peoples, or the restrictions under the Indian Act that continued until the 50s and 60s and beyond including: Indigenous residents couldn't leave their reserve without a permit (till 1951); couldn't vote till 1961. He

emphasized the need for curriculum that includes the Indigenous experience. He urged municipalities to build relationships with indigenous residents to learn and find opportunities to make our communities stronger together.

Hon. Gudie Hutchings: The Honourable Gudie Hutchings, federal Minister of Rural Economic Development stressed the importance of agricultural economy. She noted rural Canada is 20% of population and contributes 30% of GDP. The federal rural strategy aims to ensure a rural lens on programs and policies, including investment in broadband.

Premier Doug Ford: Premier Ford addressed delegates and spoke of the importance of rural economies and broadband. The province is investing nearly \$4 billion over six years beginning in 2019-20 in broadband infrastructure. There was also focus on how population growth will affect all municipalities. It is projected that Ontario will see a population increase of more than 2 million people over the next decade, particularly in and around the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Link to his full speech is here: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/speech/1001461/premier-doug-fords-speech-at-the-rural-ontario-municipal-association-2022-conference>

Hon. Andrea Horwath: The Honourable Andrea Horwath, Leader of the provincial New Democratic Party, and Ontario's Leader of the Opposition, advocated to preserve and protect rural farmland from urban expansion. She also called for more funding for rural broadband.

We were given an update from ROMA Chair, Robin Jones, and by Jamie McGarvey, AMO President.

Additional political party speakers included The Hon. Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, The Hon. Helena Jaczek, Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Steven Del Duca, Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario, Mike Schreiner, Leader, Green Party of Ontario, The Hon. Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and The Hon. Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure.

Day two's keynote was **Dr. Bruce Lourie** on the role of science in policy. Dr. Lourie is an environmental policy expert and Co-author of international bestseller *Slow Death by Rubber Duck*. He explored how best to navigate the complexity and cut to the chase on the most recent and relevant ideas for managing climate risk and transitioning to a net-zero economy. Councillor Bentivegna found value in his comments related to various approaches that can be taken to address emissions from animal agriculture and nitrogen fertilizer use that are in development, as well as his insights into sustainable farming and food system models that remain immature in this diverse sector. Other takeaways of note for Councillor Bentivegna included:

- Alternative crop regimes and technologies to reduce nitrogen fertilizer use
- Improving manure management and reducing enteric emissions
- Encouraging production and consumption of alternative proteins
- Agri-food production of 10% of Canadian emissions (2% from energy use and 8% from agricultural practices)
- Additional emissions being produced from input production and food processing, manufacturing and transportation.

There were also **daily Ministers' Forums** with dozens of provincial ministers that touched on topics such as adapting health and social services for rural communities in a post-pandemic environment and how to spark rural economic growth with the environment, infrastructure and resource development.

Two items of note:

- The Minister of Transportation Hon. Caroline Mulroney was asked about the 413 highway and the possibility of buying back the 407 and making that the highway for everyone. She reiterated the government's commitment to building the 413 (as well as the Bradford Bypass).
- Attorney General Doug Downey was asked about action to address Joint and Several Liability (JSL) – so municipalities don't pay a greater share of a settlement than the proportion of their liability. (Reference the resolution on this matter recently unanimously approved by Burlington City Council: [Item 15.1 Joint & Several Liability](#)). He said he has found no connection between JSL and increased municipal insurance rates (which misses the point of fairness in decisions) but is continuing to do more work on this.

ROMA Action Plan

During the conference, ROMA released an action plan on rural growth and resiliency entitled **Opportunities for Rural Ontario in a Post-Covid World**. Commissioned by the ROMA Board, the plan outlines nearly two dozen ways to rethink the role of rural communities in the economic and social vitality of the province – today and in the future. One key takeaway was seeing rural and urban areas as not separate and distinct, but as part of an interconnected whole.

Read the whole report here: <https://www.roma.on.ca/opportunities-rural-ontario-post-covid-world>

Networking:

ZONE Meeting

The Mayor dropped by the ZONE meeting for Halton, where the key issues discussed were rural broadband and developing a “near urban” agricultural strategy, noting the specific challenges of our agricultural community next to highly urban areas. What works for urban may not for rural - for example traffic roundabouts are great for traffic flow but can be a challenge for farm equipment too large and wide to make the turns. We were joined by Drew Spoelstra from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture who stressed the importance of preserving farmland near urban areas, and also pointed to OFA’s Home Grown campaign which aims to raise awareness of the importance of preserving Ontario farmland for the production of food, fuel, flowers and fibre.

<https://ofa.on.ca/newsroom/local-food-is-key-to-a-healthy-diet/>

ROMA’s governance board has seats for each Zone. Burlington is part of ZONE 4, which includes: Dufferin County, Halton Region, Peel Region, Simcoe County and York Region. Our ZONE 4 representative is Allan Thompson, Mayor of the Town of Caledon.

Rural Change Makers:

The Mayor dropped in to the Rural Ontario Institute’s youth rural community development program. The Institute aims to develop future leaders and facilitate collaboration on issues facing rural and northern communities. The Rural Change Makers program is open to residents across the province, 18 to 29 years old who live in rural Ontario. Applications are open and ongoing for the 2022 cohort, available here: Rural Change Makers. Change Makers come together to mobilize action in their community, structured around an identified priority in their region.

Educational Presentations:

Insightful presentations from experts and thought leaders included:

- Ideas for filling the housing information gap in rural communities where we learned about the partnership between the Rural Ontario Institute, Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus and IT firm Itery, that addresses a housing shortfall through the creation of an innovative digital tool.
- A Question Box Panel with:
 - Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer, Town of The Blue Mountains
 - Jody Johnson, Director, Legal Services, Halton Region
 - Andy Jones, Chief Building Official, Town of Gravenhurst

- Sid Vander Veen, Drainage Specialist, R. J. Burnside & Associates Limited
- Robert Walton, General Manager - Operations, County of Brant
- Sandra Weber, Director, Huron County Planning and Development Department

Councillor Bentivegna had some valuable takeaways from the session on Community Safety and Well Being including:

- Statistics that showed 446,235 Speeding offences in Ontario, 582 fatalities and 46,992 injuries
- Information around Automated Speed Enforcement (Red-Light Cameras)
 - a tool to enforce speed limits in targeted zones
 - automatic system that combines a camera and speed measuring equipment to detect and capture images of vehicles travelling above the speed limit
 - designed to work with other measures such as policing, engineering design, education activities
- The ask for what is needed including:
 - Rural Traffic data
 - Designations of any rural community or school safety zones
 - Educate constituents of the safety benefits of Red-Light Cameras

Daily summaries of speakers and daily media announcements from throughout the event can be found on the ROMA website here: <https://www.roma.on.ca/roma-insider>

Delegations:

Mayor Meed Ward participated in two delegations with provincial ministers or their representatives on a variety of issues. She was joined by Kelly Cook, Senior Planner and staff liaison to the Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee (BARAAC) and Helen Walihura, Manager of Government Relations:

Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark and **ADM Craig Brown, Policy Division, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry** to discuss Red Tape reduction, and a coordinated approach to approvals.

Our farmers and rural/agricultural businesses like Backed By Bees are a cornerstone of Burlington's economy and a core part of our history and identity as a community. But we know Red Tape can be a problem for new businesses in our rural area. We shared the story of Backed by Bees - which took 2.5 years for approvals - in our meeting at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association with the Deputy Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Natural Resources and Forestry, Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Regulations can be onerous and favour large scale operations and prolonged timelines are an issue with multiple agencies involved. We advocated to host a pilot project in Burlington that would coordinate planning approvals across agencies including the Niagara Escarpment Commission and Conservation Halton.

Special thanks to BARAAC for developing a set of advocacy priorities to inform these discussions and for pulling together the Backed by Bees case study. Their 2022 workplan will focus on identifying improvements in the various agri-business approvals processes and providing recommendations to city council.

The presentation shared with the ministry can be found as Appendix A to this report.

Minister Lisa Thompson of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, joined by Oakville North Burlington MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos and Burlington MPP Jane McKenna, to discuss thinking differently and inclusively about farmers “in the City” when engaging with the agricultural sector.

We advocated for the Ministry to consider focused stakeholder groups for urban/rural split municipalities, where feasible, and discussed:

- Acknowledging the reality of competing provincial interests in rural areas. Prime agricultural lands are often the interest that gives way to accommodate urban boundary expansions, highways and aggregate extraction, while protecting the natural heritage systems.
- Considering cumulative Agricultural Impact Assessments and measuring the health and viability of the Agricultural System at a Provincial scale.
- Investing in soil restoration and enhancement to build agricultural system health and resiliency.

The Minister offered to join a future meeting of the Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee (BARAAC), with the local MPPs.

The presentation shared with the ministry can be found as Appendix B to this report.

Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario (TAPMO)

Burlington has a seat around the TAPMO table by virtue of having three active quarries in our jurisdiction (See Table 2, Page 5 of Halton Region’s 2021 [State of Aggregate Resources](#) report): [Aldershot Quarry](#) (Meridian Brick Canada Ltd.); Tansley Quarry (Meridian Brick Canada Ltd.); and [Burlington Quarry - The Majority](#) (Nelson Aggregates Co). The Chair of TAPMO is James Seeley, Mayor, Township of Puslinch.

Annually, TAPMO schedules a board meeting in conjunction with the ROMA conference. This year, that meeting took place on Sunday, January 23rd.

The focus of this year's discussion was the impact of a recent court ruling led by Wellington County related to the valuation methodology of quarry properties. The ruling accepted a new formula which essentially increases the value by about 2.5 times. This is a significant achievement for municipalities to receive an appropriate amount of taxes from aggregate producers, and ensure they pay for their fair share. Municipalities have the opportunity to appeal the assessments under the old formula to the Assessment Review Board to receive the new valuation and additional dollars. The opportunity to appeal is for the 2022 and 2023 years, until the new assessment year where this will be automatically incorporated. Paperwork must be filed by the end of March. The Mayor will be working with staff to explore this option and report back to council.

A second part of the court ruling is now under appeal, and that is the tax classification of aggregate operations whether industrial, farm or residential. There are significant tax implications depending, given the different tax rates for each class. The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation has joined aggregate landowners in fighting reclassification, against Wellington County which is seeking a more appropriate tax class rate for aggregates that better reflects their actual activities and ensures aggregate operations pay their fair share of property taxes. The Mayor will report back on that in a future report once the court case is settled.

The agenda and minutes of TAPMO can be found at this link: [TAPMO](#).

Financial Matters:

Total Financial Impact

The cost of the Mayor's attendance at the virtual event was a \$450 registration fee paid through her budget.

Climate Implications

N/A

Engagement Matters:

N/A

Conclusion:

Receive and file this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Marianne Meed Ward

Appendices:

- A. Presentation Shared with Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry
- B. Presentation shared with Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Report Approval:

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