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The Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference, was held January 24-26th. I was pleased to attend, wearing several hats: as Mayor of Mississippi Mills, as Warden of Lanark County and sitting on the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus and as a Director of the ROMA Board. The ROMA Board hosted the event.

Approximately 270 of Ontario's 444 municipalities have populations of less than 10,000, while many more, like Mississippi Mills, are rural in character. ROMA is the rural arm of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and advocates for policies and programs that will help build thriving rural Ontario communities

Normally the conference is held in Toronto, but this year the conference was hosted virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions. It is a great opportunity to learn and connect with other municipal leaders. The focus is on the challenges we share as rural communities. Approximately 1100 delegates attended from across Ontario.

The conference also provides several opportunities to interact with Provincial leaders and advocate for our communities. There were nearly 300 delegation meetings that connected municipal and provincial leaders. I was fortunate to participate in 6 meetings with provincial leaders focusing on local and rural priorities.

Mississippi Mills Delegation with Attorney General

CAO Kelly and Fire Chief Brown and I met with the Attorney General, Doug Downey and his staff to discuss options to improve enforcement of current bylaws.

Mississippi Mills staff have been working on options to improve the enforcement of current bylaws. The complex and costly process to enforce Provincial Offences Act Part 1 and Part 3 items means that in some circumstances the enforcement is not pursued. Therefore, issues are not addressed. There are a number of larger municipalities that have implemented administrative monetary penalties (AMPs) as an alternative that avoid issuing tickets that would require a court appearance as a Part 3 summons or as an appeal of a Part 1 ticket.

AMPs reduce the legal costs and time associated with enforcement and are starting to be used in building code, parking enforcement and others. AMPs are tools for issues or penalties of low significance but warrant some penalty to address behaviour. Mississippi Mills met with the Attorney General to understand if smaller municipalities would be provided any additional guidance, if the Province was

pursuing additions to the Provincial Offences Act for Fire Protection and Prevention Act violations, and if automated speed enforcement such as the use of photo radar would be considered.

Lanark County Delegation with Ministry of Education.

As County Warden, I lead a delegation meeting with Sam Oosterhoff, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education. I was joined by Lanark County CAO Kurt Greaves and our Director of Social Services, Emily Hollington.

We discussed the importance of childcare in our economic recovery from COVID as well as its importance to rural growth. Our intention was to paint a picture of what childcare in rural Eastern Ontario looks like, and to provide the Ministry with some suggestions in making improvements throughout the province. Some of our suggestions:

- Allocate funds to align with municipal growth so we can be visionary instead of reactionary.
- Encourage recruitment and retention of Early Childhood Educators. Let's deem ECEs a skilled profession.
- Provide incentives to encourage new providers to enter the licensed childcare system
- Remove red tape and unnecessary reporting to focus resources on care
- Allow for local flexibility that can address the unique needs and circumstances of rural communities

To learn more about Children's Services in Lanark County please visit:

<http://www.county.lanark.on.ca/Page1993.aspx>

Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus Delegations: Provincial Ministers and NDP Caucus

As Warden of Lanark County, I sit on the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC). The EOWC supports and advocates on behalf of the 750,000 property taxpayers across rural Eastern Ontario. The EOWC covers an area of 45,000 square kilometres from Cobourg to the Quebec border, and includes 13 upper-tier and single-tier municipalities as well as 90 local municipalities. All members work together as a team, striving to ensure that conditions are in place to make Eastern Ontario the greatest place in the world to reside and do business.

Members of EOWC met with various provincial Ministers in a multi-ministerial delegation and then met separately with the NDP Caucus (the official opposition) to discuss priority issues for the region, including:

- the Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN) Gig Project;

- the Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN) Cell Gap Project;
- the comprehensive review of Eastern Ontario Long-Term Care facilities;
- Municipal Recovery; and
- Affordable Housing.

For more information about the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, please visit:

www.eowc.org

ROMA Board Multi-Minister Delegation

The ROMA Board met with several ministers at once in a multi-ministerial meeting. As a Board Director, I participated in this delegation and posed a few questions to Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Also in attendance were:

- Steve Clark, Minister of Rural Affairs and Housing
- Christine Elliott, Minister of Health/Deputy Premier
- Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure
- Jeff Yurek, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
- John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

We presented a variety of topics including:

- Challenges small businesses are facing during lockdown while larger box stores remain open.
- Vaccination rollouts in rural areas
- Blue box transition to producer responsibility
- Flood mapping and monitoring points
- Help encouraging the federal housing funding to be distributed to more areas of the province, not only urban areas.

Conference Sessions

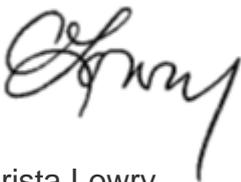
The ROMA conference provided sessions on critical matters such as community paramedics, broadband, policing, flooding and broadband connectivity. As a ROMA Board member, I moderated a session on ***Innovative Care Models and Services for Seniors in Rural Communities***, hosting Amber Colibaba, Research Coordinator of the Rural Aging Research Program at Trent University; Arlene Etchen, Outreach Specialist of Partnerships and Promotions at the Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation; and Jane Sinclair, General Manager of Health & Emergency Services at the County of Simcoe. Seniors are the fastest growing age group in Ontario, and this session underlined how important it is to understand the living and care options for seniors in rural Ontario. We also

discussed solutions that enhance the quality of seniors care regardless of where they live and how innovative care models can be possible in your communities.

Other highlights of the conference include:

- Premier Ford announced that the 2021 funding envelope for the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF) will remain stable at \$200 million for 424 municipalities that receive it. OCIF supports core municipal infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water, wastewater and stormwater systems.
- Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs announced the launch of the second intake of the Municipal Modernization Fund. The Province is investing \$40 million to help small and rural municipalities with service delivery reviews and modernization efforts, targeting 405 municipalities across Ontario.
- Conference delegates participated in two open question and answer sessions with provincial ministers. Topics included economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Blue Box transition to full producer responsibility, municipal insurance costs and joint and several liability, broadband access, and funding for transportation infrastructure.
- ROMA's Board elected a new executive:
 - Chair Robin Jones, Mayor of the Village of Westport.
 - First Vice Chair Kevin Holland, Mayor of the Township of Conmee
 - Second Vice Chair Eli El-Chantiry, Ottawa City Councillor.

More information about ROMA's advocacy work for Rural Ontario or to view conference presentations from a number of key speakers please visit www.roma.on.ca.



Christa Lowry
Mayor of Mississippi Mills



Minister Downey, Attorney General



Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference 2021

EOWC Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus Multi-Ministerial Meeting



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Multi-Ministerial Meeting



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**Sam Oosterhoff
Parliamentary Assistant to the
Minister of Education**



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