

Municipal leaders share ideas to improve provincial requirements

By Mark Pavilons

Provincial and municipal leaders met to discuss simplifying the process, at the recent annual conference of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in Ottawa.

At the conference, Prabmeet Sarkaria, Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, invited mayors and other municipal leaders from across Ontario to a roundtable to hear their ideas on simplifying interactions with the province.

The leaders also addressed regulatory barriers to municipal services and small business investment in their communities. At the roundtable, Minister Sarkaria said the provincial government places high priority on modernizing regulations to reduce duplication, streamlining processes and empowering municipalities to better serve their communities. The engaged and thoughtful discussions at the roundtable made it clear this is also a vital issue for local governments.

Municipal leaders raised concerns about outdated processes and suggested more efficient ways to achieve shared provincial and municipal objectives to help communities grow, drive local investment and create good jobs.

"The words from the minister was music to my ears, but it is the Province that needs to get their processes in order," stressed King Mayor Steve Pellegrini.

He pointed out that King has been dealing for years with Metrolinx and trying to get a clear answer about whistle cessation and the 400 expansion was approved in 1992 and "we are still under constant construction."

"Municipal governments have a finger closest on the pulse of the needs of our communities and regularly have to navigate the processes that the province puts in place," Sarkaria told the municipal leaders. "I received valuable insights into key issues and suggestions on how we can collaborate to resolve them. I'm going to take the things shared back to our partner ministries to see how we can address the issues raised."

Ontario has already taken action to streamline processes and update regulations on municipalities as part of its plan to make Ontario work smarter for businesses and better for people. Last Spring the province eliminated the need for municipalities to go through an Environmental Assessment process for low-risk activities, like putting in a bike lane or undertaking a streetscaping process. The government is also dramatically reducing the number of routine reports it requires municipalities to file with provincial ministries, which currently tops 400. Ontario has identified 94 unnecessary reports it will wind down and another 27 it will consolidate and simplify.