

Province dedicates funds to municipalities, retains current model

By Mark Pavilons

The uncertainty over the fate of Ontario's municipal governments is now over. The Province has decided to retain the status quo, and direct dedicated funds to regional governments that will drive efficiencies and strengthen local service delivery.

Ontario is providing up to \$143 million to municipalities to help them lower costs and improve services for local residents over the long term. Funding will be available to all 444 municipalities so they can find smarter, more efficient ways to operate and focus spending on vital programs and services for Ontarians.

King Mayor Steve Pellegrini said York municipalities have always worked collaboratively to find efficiencies. Now that the uncertainty is over, "we can get down to business."

The news was a welcomed announcement and was a topic of discussion at the Northern Six (N6) municipalities of York Region Mayors and Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) meeting. Each year, the N6 mayors and CAOs meet to discuss cost-saving initiatives and programs that could be of benefit to all six municipalities in the coming year.

Throughout the province's review, the special advisors conducting the feedback interviews expressed great interest in the N6 partnerships. By working together, the N6 exemplifies the benefits that a cohesive approach to shared service delivery can create for residents. It is these cross-municipal initiatives that make amalgamation unnecessary.

"I'm pleased that the provincial government took the time to consult with the numerous stakeholders who would have been impacted by potential amalgamation," said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. "In King Township, we believe our municipality is best positioned to provide high-quality programs and services to its residents and businesses. We're happy that the province has recognized that a top-down approach to governance isn't always the best approach, especially when it comes to municipalities like King Township. We will continue to look for ways to partner with our N6 neighbours in order to deliver programs and services in a cost-effective manner."

The N6 partnership, which has been successfully operating since 2005, has worked on a number of award winning, and cost effective programs such as a shared waste collection program, which is now in its second 10-year term and has helped the N6 save over \$11 million. In addition, the N6 partnered on the Fire Master Plan and Collaboration and Innovation Report, which identifies collaborative cost-sharing and innovative partnership ideas. In 2011, the N6 conducted joint procurement of an insurance provider and retainer of an insurance adjuster resulting in approximately \$750,000 in premium savings, during the first year of the project. Not only do the N6 municipalities create cost-saving measures for residents, they also work together to leverage best practices, share ideas and information across the municipalities. Moving forward, the N6 is looking at future opportunities to further the N6 partnership and prioritize savings for taxpayers and municipal efficiencies.

Wayne Emmerson, York Region chairman and CEO, noted the current two-tier structure is the most effective means to deliver critical services to communities.

"I am pleased with the provincial announcement to help make Ontario municipalities stronger. They have listened to our feedback and committed to having governance, service-delivery and decision making of municipalities left in the hands of local governments. York Region is proud to have a strong culture of continuous improvement. We deliver high-quality programs and services to our residents while continually striving to provide the best value to the taxpayer.

"Strengthening regional government is a priority for York Regional council. I applaud the Ontario government for committing additional funds to help government leverage further efficiencies. As part of our commitment to innovation, we look forward to working with our provincial partners to further explore ways to optimize service delivery and reduce costs, while at the same time ensuring we continue to build thriving communities for our residents, businesses and visitors."

"Municipalities are the level of government closest to the people, but every community is different - one size doesn't fit all," said Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. "This investment in communities will support municipal transformation efforts to make sure they are delivering efficient, effective and modern services that best meet the unique needs of their residents." The government is working in partnership with municipalities to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are respected. Earlier this year, the government conducted a review of Ontario's eight regional governments and Simcoe County. Over 8,500 submissions were received and the Special Advisors, Michael Fenn and Ken Seiling, attended nine in-person sessions and listened to ideas from individuals and

organizations on how to improve their local governments.

Throughout this extensive review, the government heard that local communities should decide what is best for them in terms of governance, decision-making and service delivery. After careful consideration of the feedback we heard through the course of the review, our government stands firm in its commitment to partnering with municipalities without pursuing a top-down approach. The Province will provide municipalities with the resources to support local decision-making.

‘We are committed to helping and empowering municipalities to become more efficient and effective, so they can make every dollar count,’ said Clark. ‘This investment supports the province’s commitment to reduce the cost of government, while maintaining quality services the people of Ontario expect from all levels of government.’

The government is extending two application-based funding streams: one for small and rural municipalities, and one for large urban governments.

The 2020 Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund will have the same structure as this year and provide a total of \$500 million to 389 municipalities across the province.

Ontario will also launch a consultation with municipalities about whether to align the municipal and provincial fiscal year.

The government is proposing to eliminate duplication by combining the provincial and municipal voters lists, giving Elections Ontario the responsibility of managing the updated list and taking the burden off of municipalities.