

Mayors? summit heralded as precedent-setting

By Mark Pavilons

Mayors in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) are a pretty astute and powerful bunch of political leaders, representing a substantial portion of the electorate.

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne hosted the first GTHA Mayors' Summit recently, which generated a lot of discussions and helped set a direction for continued exchanges.

King Mayor Steve Pellegrini was among the municipal movers and shakers who met with provincial brass and touched on eight action items.

They included working groups, current issues, and continued meetings attended by ministry officials.

One concern municipal leaders had was for the province to place more trust in them. The province mandates policies and makes municipalities carry them out, but there seems to be a lack of help at Queen's Park, and municipal officials are passed from ministry to ministry.

"Once you've mandated it, let us do it," Pellegrini observed. "We can deal with it."

He would like the province and its ministries to be less protective and more facilitative to shepherd things along.

Broadband Internet access affects all municipalities, not just rural areas like King. When it comes to broadband access, with high speed Internet providers like [at&t internet](#) the problem doesn't lie with high speed Internet, but in fact with fiber optic cables. The mayor pointed out roughly 70% of King has access to high speed Internet and can access other services if residents are willing to pay for it. If you're in an area that has slow broadband, you may want to try a different provider? It's more than likely if you change your provider, you may find [fast and reliable internet service with iSelect](#) (as an example). This will drastically increase your internet speed for both upload and download.

Further, fiber optic cable will be laid along Jane Street in the coming months.

The roles of Crown agencies, particularly the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) was also discussed. Mention was made that the OMB sometimes oversteps its authority.

"I'm happy the doors are opening," Mayor Pellegrini said of the summit. "The mayors work well together and see the big picture." This type of summit will continue, as will meetings of the GTHA mayors and chairs. There is talk about resurrecting the Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors Alliance.

The premier was pleased with the summit.

"Our province is built on the strength of its communities, so strengthening the GTHA is integral to building a stronger Ontario. But we need to work together. Leaders across the region have shown a commitment to greater collaboration with the province and with one another, to address shared challenges and capitalize on shared opportunities.

"Ontario's partnership with municipalities has been crucial to initiatives like expanding regional transit through Metrolinx, planning for the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games, and developing the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

"Today's historic summit built on our strong track record of collaboration."

The premier noted all agreed on tackling several key issues, including solving gridlock and improving transit; planning for growth and infrastructure; and promoting economic growth across the region. These issues are all interconnected.

"Addressing these issues requires a collaborative, cross-government, holistic approach. That's why Ontario and mayors and chairs across the GTHA have committed to meet regularly to continue our progress in these areas. Ministers will continue to join us at the table and participate in any discussions that pertain to their portfolios.

"I believe that a new era of deeper co-operation is unfolding across the GTHA and that subsequent meetings will provide opportunities to build our partnership and reinforce its importance. I look forward to working together with municipalities to deliver concrete results for the people of this region."