

Municipal voices were heard at AMO conference

By Mark Pavilons

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference in Ottawa chalked up some huge wins for municipalities like King.

King was well represented at the annual forum, attended by Mayor Steve Pellegrini and councillors Bill Cober, Debbie Schaefer, David Boyd and Jordan Cescolini. They hit the ground running at the conference, paying close attention to announcements made by provincial leaders.

Premier Doug Ford addressed dignitaries at the AMO conference, where he committed to building strong, local partnerships with municipalities. Highlighting Ontario's investments in local communities, Premier Ford committed to equipping local governments with what they need to build their communities from the ground up, deliver better value for taxpayers, and build for the future. "Our government's relationship with Ontario's municipalities is incredibly important to us," said Premier Ford. "As the level of government closest to the people, municipalities know the needs of their communities best. We must work together to put local communities back in the driver's seat of their own affairs."

Ontario's municipalities work together to achieve shared goals and meet common challenges through AMO, a non-partisan, non-profit association that supports and enhances strong, effective municipal government in Ontario.

All Government of Ontario ministers attended this year's AMO conference, including King representatives Stephen Lecce and Caroline Mulroney.

From the content of announcements, King reps were thrilled by a potential boost to the new recreation centre on Seneca College lands.

The Province is opening up the intake for Community, Culture and Recreation Stream Sept. 3 of the federal Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. "This represents \$1 billion dollars for important local projects, like community centres, sports arenas, and cultural centres," Ford said.

King will definitely apply for the new rec. centre, Pellegrini said.

He noted King councillors were able to have an hour meeting with both Ministers Lecce and Mulroney and discussed issues facing King. They requested further information with regard to the 400 and the GO projects.

"I am proud of the strong leadership and representation of King and Vaughan municipal leaders at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario annual conference. I was pleased to host them for a lunch to discuss our continued efforts to invest in our community from better schools, affordable childcare, to more reliable transit and broadband expansion. We will continue to work together to serve our constituents and to advance their priorities," said Lecce.

Councillor Cober noted AMO is always a "valuable conference."

Highlights for him included municipal procurement, asset management, dealing with cannabis, property assessment, recycling changes ahead, and human resources updates with new and emerging legislation.

"One of the most valuable sessions was a challenge we are very familiar with in King - the growing gap between residential and commercial/industrial tax base. As the economy becomes more digital the gap is growing across the province and country."

The changing economy is less tied to land and Cober said the discussion focused on how municipalities must diversify revenues as land based municipal financial resources are shrinking.

"This is not new for King and remains a challenge to continuously work on. Interesting, informative sessions to help us as we always work to make King better," he said.

Municipal Affairs Minister Steve Clark told attendees the government's position is clear "our goal is to maintain municipal revenues."

On Jan. 1, the Province will transition municipalities to a 70-30 cost-sharing funding model "70% for the Province, and 30% for municipalities."

Clark said they will ensure that in the first year no public health unit experiences an increase above 10 per cent of current public health costs.

"That's the protection we've built in to ease the transition."

He pointed out that some municipalities already contribute 30% or more and these won't be impacted.

Clark lauded MPP Lecce for working tirelessly and advocating on your behalf since becoming the Minister of Education.

Child care funding will now be phased in over a three-year period starting in January 2020.

We will continue to encourage municipalities to partner with us to support children and families in our communities, but we will also adjust the approach to cost sharing Expansion Plan operating funding by committing to provide 80% of this funding regardless of the municipal contribution.

Because of this approach, the government will be reinvesting \$85.5 million back into child care for 2020, and \$36.5 million for 2021.

The Province also plans to cut more red tape and free up funding particularly in public works. This is something municipalities have been lobbying for as well. Ford said that to date, the government has identified 94 provincial reporting requirements for elimination and is simplifying or consolidating 27 others. This will allow municipalities to focus on the things that matter most the frontline services people rely on every day.

The Province is also investing \$315 million to improve and expand Internet and cell service into more rural and remote communities.