

**TOWN OF MINTO**

**DATE:** February 2, 2017  
**REPORT TO:** Mayor and Council  
**FROM:** Bill White, C.A.O. Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** ROMA 2017 Conference Summary

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**STRATEGIC PLAN:**

12.7 Demonstrate innovation in all aspects of municipal business acknowledging the importance of training, succession planning, transparency, communication and team-based approaches to municipal operations.

**BACKGROUND**

The Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference was held in Toronto January 29 to 31, the first since ROMA split with the Ontario Good Roads Association. Attendance was 30% above projections so between 800 and 1000 delegates attended with over 200 presentations to 11 Provincial Ministries.

The conference included plenary speakers, workshops, “bear pit” session (Minister Q & A) and speeches by Premier Wynne, opposition leader Patrick Brown, and the NDP municipal affairs critic. The Theme of this year’s conference was “ROMA Speaks” in reference to the Association’s first conference on their own in about 16 years.

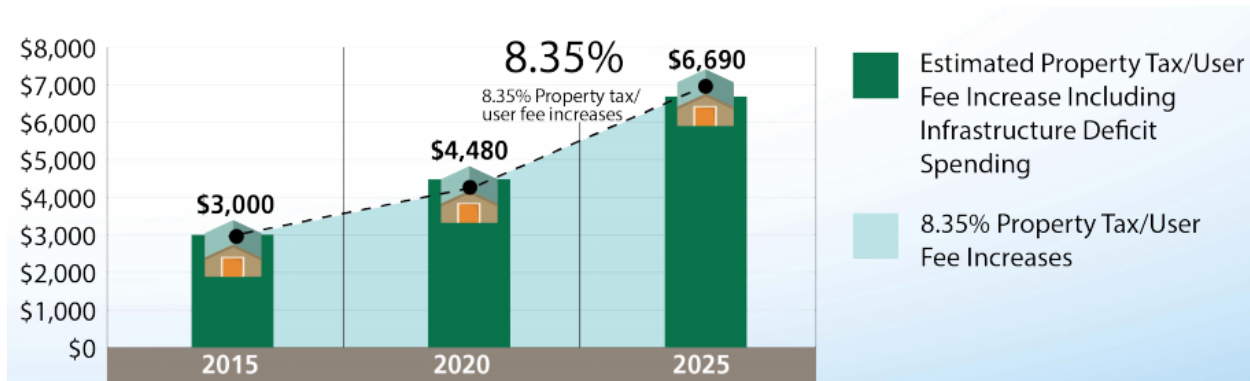
Sessions began Sunday afternoon. A session on the status of municipal social media use noted over 80% of municipalities use social media in some form. Minto is like many who have a centralized account controlled through municipal policy. This is the recommended approach so that there is a consistent message. Social media needs to be a healthy way of interacting with the community, and Minto has done well to maintain a positive approach. The session recommends a “one third rule” where a municipality spends one-third of social media posts sending out information, one-third forwarding others information which they support and one-third interacting and responding. It was valuable hearing positive and negative experiences with municipal social media.

The Opening Keynote was Doug Griffith’s “13 Ways to Kill your Community” described as a “tongue-in-cheek approach to discussing attitude and actions that will define success or failure for a community.” His message that to kill your community make sure there is not quality drinking water and you do not attract business; ignore youth, deceive yourself about community needs and by all means shop elsewhere; do not worry about the design and look of your community, stay focused on the way things used to be, never cooperate and ignore seniors and outsiders; finally become complacent, reject all new ideas and never take responsibility for your actions. These are ways to help ensure a community is not viable. While his theme may be self-evident his remarkable examples demonstrated how community viability can be damaged significantly when these “ways” are deployed. The session is a reminder to be diligent and not become complacent when building community

AMO staff provided follow up to their 2016 presentation at AMO on the 10 year shortfall between revenues and expenses for municipal operations across the Province. AMO research shows four in 10 people believe municipalities are the most responsive level of

government, two times more responsive than Provincial and Federal, while 90% agree safe infrastructure is a priority, 76% concerned property tax will not cover future costs, and over 55% support a 1% increase in HST to support local infrastructure.

Even though infrastructure spending increased \$2 billion between 2003 and 2013, \$4.9 billion more is needed between 2016 and 2025. This is up from \$3.6 billion identified in 2016 at AMO. This means that the shortfall between revenue and expense has increased by \$1.3 billion. Without another revenue source increases property taxes of 8.35% are needed annually to meet the shortfall (impact illustrated in chart below).



Much of the discussion around the conference was whether the Province would add a 1% municipal infrastructure levy to the HST. This seems to be the change AMO will pursue.

A session on innovation in small water and waste water systems brought forward interesting ideas on preserving viable small towns and villages in Ontario. It emphasized importance of settlement areas to agriculture and recreation and how intensifying development and increasing commercial focal points helps maintains village historic character. The issue results from inefficient or non-existing water and sewer systems. One solution being looked at is Clearford's inline sewage system that can service small areas at a much lower cost by eliminating the need for a large treatment plant. The Province is preparing a development standard to encourage redevelopment and infill in small towns and villages.

Energy and climate change were key issues in several sessions. The Province notes a 13% decrease in power demand since 2005 due to economic factors, efficiency programs, consumer behavior and individual supply. Power supply has changed by eliminating coal supply (-22%), emergence of solar wind and bioenergy (9%), with natural gas (10%), water power and (23%) nuclear now supplying the bulk of power. While Ontario is a net exporter of power to Michigan and New York the issue is the cost to generate far exceeds revenue received. Electricity costs increased as investments were made to decarbonize (\$35+ billion) and modernize the province's electricity infrastructure (\$15+ billion investment in Hydro One transmission and distribution). Consultation is underway on the Long Term Energy Plan, with implementation scheduled to be completed by 2019.

Premier Wynne spoke about quality of life for seniors, jobs for youth, clean water and infrastructure spending as well as changes in Ontario over the last 150 years. She talked about bridging the gap between rural and urban noting we have more in common than what we may think. She identified SWIFT as a major initiative to provide high speed internet to 3.5 million people, and some 200 more projects under the OCIF program that will proceed

as a result of Provincial investment. Consolidating school boards, climate change efforts and job creation through programs like RED that “**has supported small businesses in Minto**” are examples of accomplishments achieved by the government. She promised relief on electricity bills upwards of 20%, grants to build new gas infrastructure and better communication to enhance community growth in the Province.

Patrick Brown PC Leader spoke of four pillars of economic development to increase Ontario’s competitiveness being decreased red tape, building infrastructure, affordable energy, and education linked to employment need. This means decreasing regulation (over 383,000 in Ontario), investing in shovel ready projects, competitive response to climate change and addressing labour shortages with increased emphasis on trades required by Ontario employers. His government would be more active supporting natural gas expansion in rural areas. He emphasized the need to increase competitiveness to challenge the changes occurring in the U.S., and spoke of maintaining municipal OMPF funding and reducing the regulation burden on municipalities.

John VanThof NDP Rural Affairs Critic spoke about concerns rural municipalities have to increase services comparing them to years ago when northern Ontario lobbied for basic improvements to roads and telephone service. He confirmed the need to address power bills and questioned the sale of Hydro One favouring a public hydro system benefitting all Ontarians. He outlined the difference in problems between rural and urban areas, and suggested formation of a “Northern Committee” to review legislation as to impacts on northern residents.

Sessions on Asset Management, Municipal Election Reform, Ombudsmen oversight, transportation and similar provided choice for attendees to gain insight into emerging municipal concerns.

#### **COMMENTS:**

The program supporting redevelopment of local villages and towns that are failing in parts of Ontario was encouraging in the sense of the advantages Minto has in its small towns. This includes sewer and water, active community halls and arenas, parks, and service oriented downtowns. The Clearford inline sewage system may be an option for developing new parts of our urban areas where sewage capacity is limited. Staff and Triton Engineering are looking into the system to assess whether it may be part of a future growth solution in Minto.

It is evident the natural gas lobby has made headway with the Province with a strong presence at ROMA. This suggests concerns about energy affordability in rural Ontario are at least in part being heard, but it is interesting that the Provincial Energy Plan is not yet approved although climate change levies on fossil fuels have begun. This means \$1.9 billion in revenue to the Province without a final plan on energy policy. While this has generated much discussion, there appears to be little in the way of practical solutions for small rural municipalities.

The Town has numerous energy and environmental initiatives to implement its Strategic Plan and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In light of the direction the current government is taking, the Town has no choice but to consider developing a formal energy strategy so that it might take advantage of incentives, rebates and other grants anticipated to come back through Provincial Climate initiatives. The Town’s energy strategy should build

upon its Integrated Sustainability Plan and would involve community engagement and partnership development.

Part of the presentation on energy initiatives was on the Ontario Sustainability Services <http://ontariosustainability.ca/quicklaunch-2/> designed as a template to assist local municipalities with climate initiatives. The following is a quote directly from their website:

“In the coming four years we expect to see greater pressures on municipal budgets as the Province of Ontario grapples with a restraint agenda. Equally important is the growing pressure on municipalities, by their residents, to actively pursue mitigation and adaptation measures to address changing climate’s challenges. These two forces will result in a demand on municipalities to be seen as active participants in renewable energy. This convergence will, in the near term, encourage municipalities to embrace and/or move to a willing host position regarding renewable energy generation projects.”

The Community Energy Partnership Program is a 90% grant that could support a municipal community energy plan to develop a project through a renewable energy co-operative. This could include local people having the opportunity to invest in local renewable projects. It is important to move forward under this regulatory environment without making major financial commitments until the Provincial energy strategy is approved. A change in government in 2018 could dramatically change the Provincial approach to climate change.

It is recommended Minto’s Energy Strategy be developed in house, with the assistance of Triton Engineering, by bringing together current Town policy and practice related to the environment, engaging the community in potential new directions and developing a strategy implement those directions. The Town’s Plan would merge with the final Provincial Energy Plan some time in 2018 to form Minto’s Energy Strategy for the coming decade.

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

The annual ROMA conference cost is covered within existing budget allocations. A Minto Energy Strategy would be developed in-house with no added budget cost at this time.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT Council receives the C.A.O. Clerk’s February 2 report ROMA 2017 Conference Summary and supports initiation in-house of a formal Minto Energy Strategy to be developed with the assistance of Triton Engineering in consultation with community members and stakeholders.

Bill White, C.A.O. Clerk