



Staff Report to Council - for Direction

Title: Government Relations Update - April 2024

From: Aaron Stauch, Director, Government Relations

Date: April 18, 2024

Staff Recommendation:

That Council endorses the additional priorities identified as part of the ongoing Government Relations policy agenda.

Report Summary:

The report outlines the accomplishments of the Government Relations Department, highlights progress made on previous action priorities, and introduces new areas of focus.

Background:

Since the previous report to Council in November 2023, we continue to advance our strategy and make progress on our Government Relation priorities. The following are some highlights of our recent engagements:

- **Local MPP Engagement:** We have established regular touchpoints with Minister Thompson (MPP Huron-Bruce) and Parliamentary Assistant Byers (MPP Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound). These touch points have provided an opportunity to profile local needs, such as: AMO and ROMA delegation debriefs; access to Building Faster Fund; creation of an upper tier Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan; and work being led by the County. These meetings have helped our local MPPs advocate for local needs.
- **Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference:** In January 2024 we took four delegations to Provincial Ministers, Parliamentary Assistants, and Ministry Staff. Our delegations focused on: (1) the needs of host communities in the planning process for nuclear facilities; (2) seeking collaboration to pilot and expand the Community Response Program (providing mental health and addictions support); (3) seeking continued transformation of Social Assistance to accelerate outcomes; and (4) providing feedback on the long-term care regulatory and enforcement approaches. Follow-up work regarding these delegations is still ongoing. Support was also provided to staff members who participated in three panels at ROMA discussing: (1) Exploring Solutions to Increasing Housing in the Rural Context; (2) Indigenous Partners: Unlocking the Power of Collaboration; and (3) The Future of Feeding Ontario.

- **Canadian Nuclear Association (CNA) Conference:** in February we met with the Minister of Natural Resources' staff, and with federal opposition critic for Natural Resources, MPP Shannon Stubbs. These were introductory meetings focused on starting the conversation regarding the County's role in increased investment in energy infrastructure projects, specifically new nuclear power, medical isotopes, and the deep geological repository.

These engagements provided the forum for local elected officials, and staff to share the needs of Bruce County. The Government Relations Department is following up with each of these engagements to encourage provincial and federal progress on our needs.

Semi-Annual Priority Update

As part of the new Government Relations Department's business processes, we will be conducting a semi-annual review of our advocacy priorities to make sure we are bringing the most relevant conversations to our provincial and federal partners. This work will be completed approximately 5 months in advance of the annual AMO (August) and ROMA (January) conference. This new approach creates a planning timeline that allows us to align with local municipalities, and other advocacy partners (e.g. Western Ontario Warden's Caucus) increasing our effectiveness in addressing local needs.

The Western Ontario Warden's Caucus meet on April 5, 2024, to outline its priorities for the coming year. The following is the high-level overview of these priorities:

- **Showcase Initiatives:** These are WOWC priorities that will be their primary focus.
 - Housing
 - Mental Health, Addictions, and Homelessness
 - Workforce to Support Economic Growth
 - Infrastructure
- **Support:** These are WOWC priorities where they will support other's work.
 - Long-Term Care and Seniors Funding
 - AMO's Social and Economic Prosperity Review
 - Broadband Internet
 - Public Transit
 - Childcare

With WOWC having defined their priorities, this allows us to focus on supporting WOWC initiatives while also defining our own advocacy approach. The following are the recommended advocacy priorities for Bruce County:

- **Role of Nuclear Host Communities:** Building on the initial conversation we have had with the provincial and federal governments about the need for a framework for the role of nuclear host communities we plan to continue this engagement. Specifically, we are working with the Community Development Office, Bruce Power, and NWMO to understand anticipated local impacts of nuclear projects. As those impacts are understood we will establish meetings, jointly with local municipalities and other partners, to advocate for the needs of the area as these investments are made. We

are also engaging with the Canadian Association of Nuclear Host Communities (CANHC) to support their work in establishing a better framework for the engagement of host communities. [*Strategic Alignment: Growth & Innovation: Goal 4: Promote Responsible Growth; Community and Partnerships: Goal 2: Enhance and Grow Partnerships*].

- **Housing:** We will support WOWC's priority and given the importance of this issue for Bruce County we will also have our own approach. Over the past year Bruce County has advocated for the authority to establish an Upper-Tier Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan, we will continue to support the follow-up work required to deliver this vital tool through a delegation to the Ministers of Housing and Municipal Affairs, and Red Tape Reduction. We will also begin discussions about access to the variety of provincial and federal government's new funding envelopes to accelerate housing. In addition, we will start conversation about build a rural model of transitional and supportive housing, partnering with area County governments. Work of the Community Development Office will inform this advocacy. [*Strategic Alignment: Growth & Innovation: Goal 4: Promote Responsible Growth; Community and Partnerships: Goal 1: Build a Strong and Inclusive Community*].
- **Long-Term Care Stability:** We have started conversations with WOWC, AMO, and the provincial government on the need to develop a new approach to the funding of long-term care in the municipal context. We will continue to work with advocacy partners to bring attention to this challenge for municipalities. This includes conversation about recent announcements related to regulatory approaches, enforcement overreach, the need for new approach to funding models, and the need for workforce development. [*Strategic Alignment: Culture and Capacity: Goal 6: Be an employer of choice; Community and Partnerships: Goal 1: Build a Strong and Inclusive Community*].
- **Poverty Reduction:** Social Assistance transformation and rates, as well as food and housing security continue to be challenges that impact vulnerable individuals in our community. Bruce County has show innovation on this front through: its transformation of the Employment Ontario system and integration with Social Assistance; the work of the Community Development Office on affordable housing approaches; and the commitment of backbone support from the County for Poverty Reduction Taskforce and Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan implementation. We will continue to profile our made in Bruce success and advocate for meaning progress and transformation of these systems by the province, and an increase in Social Assistance rates. [*Strategic Alignment: Community and Partnerships: Goal 1: Build a Strong and Inclusive Community*].
- **Broadband Internet:** Access to high-speed broadband is essential for rural prosperity. Initiatives like Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) enhance internet connectivity in underserved areas of Bruce County, utilizing joint federal and provincial infrastructure funding alongside support from municipalities and private investors. Despite efforts, many areas still lack sufficient connectivity. To address this, raising awareness of Bruce County's unique rural needs and strengthening collaboration with SWIFT, higher levels of government, and private investors are

crucial advocacy strategies to improve coverage and connectivity across the County. [Strategic Alignment: Growth & Innovation: Goal 4: Promote Responsible Growth; Community and Partnerships: Goal 1: Build a Strong and Inclusive Community].

- **Rural Health:** This priority has two components:
 - **Public Health:** Frozen or reduced provincial funding, coupled with increased service demands, creates a budget shortfall for Grey-Bruce Public Health. The provincial government's plan to reduce the number of health units through voluntary amalgamations may further exacerbate these budgetary constraints, potentially altering resource allocation and funding distribution among health units. Our goal is to secure the necessary resources to sustain public health services and enhance community well-being. [Strategic Alignment: Community and Partnerships: Goal 1: Build a Strong and Inclusive Community & Goal 2: Enhance and grow partnerships].
 - **Ontario Health Teams:** As the province continues to evolve the health care system through the roll out of Ontario Health and Ontario Health teams there needs to be consideration of municipal voices in their governance structure. Ontario Health Teams will have increasing influence on how services and funding get allocated in our community. Our goal is to ensure that we get a formal role, required by the province, in the Ontario Health Team governance structure. [Strategic Alignment: Community and Partnerships: Goal 1: Build a Strong and Inclusive Community & Goal 2: Enhance and grow partnerships].

The above priorities outline key areas where we are confident that Bruce County is bringing a unique voice and perspective to the provincial and federal dialogues impacting municipalities. There are several other areas identified through our priority scan that the Government Relations Department will monitor and support, including: Indigenous reconciliation, implementation of the transit study recommendations; transportation infrastructure; agriculture; funding for the Small Business Enterprise Centre; burial funding for Social Assistance participants, private drinking water testing, and funding for libraires and community museums. The specific needs, or Bruce County's unique voice is yet to be fully understood in a number of these areas. In addition, a number of these items are being advocated for through AMO's call for a Social and Economic Prosperity Review. The Government Relations Department has established close working relationships with AMO and WOWC to partner on these advocacy approaches without the duplication of work. We will update Council on progress on these through our regular reporting.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

There are no financial, staffing, legal or IT consideration associated with this report.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

Each department was consulted regarding their individual priorities.

Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:

Strategic Goals

Notes through the document.

Link to Departmental Plan Goals and Objectives, if any:

Not applicable.

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Departmental Approval:

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