

Fiscal Sustainability: Advancing the Local Share Campaign

- Ontario's municipal governments face an average **annual shortfall of \$4.9 billion every year for the next 10 years** to maintain current services and finance infrastructure needs.
- Provincial transfers are not enough and relying on the property tax base to make ends meet is not sustainable. Across Ontario, property taxes would have to increase by 8% each year to cover the funding gap.
- Smaller property tax bases in rural municipalities make this approach unsustainable and user fees are often insufficient to cover the costs of offering municipal programs and services across large geographic distances.
- ROMA supports AMO's Local Share proposal for a **new 1% HST increase to finance local infrastructure needs**. The Local Share would create a dedicated and dependable infrastructure revenue stream for Ontario's rural municipal governments.

Rural Infrastructure

- Our roads, buildings and bridges are aging. Municipal governments in Ontario own more infrastructure than any other order of government. Much of it was built in the 1950s and 60s.
- The cost of **maintaining or replacing municipal roads and bridges alone accounts for nearly half of the municipal funding gap**. While federal and provincial infrastructure funding programs are welcome and appreciated, more needs to be done.
- This challenge is especially significant in rural jurisdictions. Municipal roads and bridges are the lifeline that binds rural communities and economies together. **Distance and extreme weather events** in remote areas combined with a small property tax base make rural infrastructure costly to maintain.
- **New Asset management regulations** require significant effort. Recent provincial commitments to provide capacity-building supports to smaller municipal governments are necessary and appreciated.

Economic Vitality in Rural Communities

- Rural communities need **access to fast, reliable and affordable broadband to participate in the digital economy**. Ensuring adequate connectivity across rural Ontario will stimulate business development and innovation and improve youth retention.
- Rural Ontario must **attract and retain immigrants** to address labour market shortages and respond to aging demographics. Diversity also enhances our social fabric.
- **Policies that support small businesses and the food, agri-business and natural resource sectors** are needed to grow rural economies.

Emergency Service Costs

- Emergency service costs are growing faster than inflation. **Policing, fire and paramedic expenses are increasing** while provincial funding supports and cost-reducing **dispatch technology** lag behind.
- Ontario's **fire-medical pilot** project proposal may lead to increased costs and unnecessary service duplication for rural municipal governments if replicated in unwilling municipalities through interest arbitration.
- ROMA is against the targeting of **'double-hatters'** who volunteer for their hometown volunteer fire departments because this practice threatens the sustainability of rural volunteer fire departments.

- **Policing modernization measures** introduced by the provincial government fall short of what is needed to manage policing costs. ROMA will advocate to promote efficient and effective policing services that rural municipalities can afford.

Land Use Appeal Reform: From OMB to LPAT

- Land use appeal processes in Ontario are undergoing significant reform. With the Royal Assent of Bill 139, **the Ontario Municipal Board is to be replaced by the Land Planning Appeal Tribunal.**
- These changes mean that rural municipal councils and staff must be clear that planning decisions are consistent with both municipal planning documents and with provincial policy.
- **ROMA is supportive of education initiatives** aimed at increasing municipal awareness of these significant changes to the land use planning appeal process.

Recreational Cannabis Legalization

- While only a handful of municipalities will see a storefront open in their jurisdiction, legal cannabis will directly reach rural communities through **online orders and mail-delivery.** Cannabis cultivation and production sites are also cropping up across rural Ontario.
- Cannabis legalization may result in **increased policing, bylaw, emergency response and social service costs for municipalities.** As front-line governments, municipalities will be the first to respond to negative impacts in our communities.
- **Rural communities must be 'kept whole.'** Municipal governments should not have to finance the costs of implementing federal and provincial directions.
- An adequate portion of **cannabis tax revenues** should also be given to rural municipal governments to address the impacts of recreational cannabis legalization and substance abuse.
- **Rural voices must be respected.** Some communities welcome recreational cannabis legalization as an economic opportunity, while others are unwilling hosts. The provincial and federal governments must respond to local perspectives and bylaws.

Social Vitality in Rural Municipalities

- School closures threaten the social and economic fabric of rural municipalities, especially in one-school communities. The **Pupil Accommodation Review Process** must be strengthened so that decisions better reflect community-wide needs and prioritize student well-being.
- Our residents deserve **access to health services** comparable to those in urban centres. Funding supports and greater use of public-private partnerships are necessary.
- Rural **seniors** should be able to **age in place** close to family, friends and community. Smaller homes located in rural areas face fiscal challenges due to lower bed counts and fixed infrastructure costs. Enhanced funding supports would enable these homes to remain open.
- Provincial efforts to address **the opioid crisis** by increasing resident access to addiction clinics, front-line harm reduction workers and to expand the supply of naloxone to first-responders are welcome.

Growing a Rural Voice: Succession Planning for the Future

- Rural municipal employees are entering their silver years. **Over the next decade 50% of municipal public servants in Ontario will be eligible for retirement.**
- Rural municipal governments must prepare to **attract, invest in and adapt to younger talent** at both political and administrative levels to project Ontario's rural voice into the future.
- Our **aging workforces also require investment.** Productive aging practices will be key to rural municipal governments moving forward.

Reconciliation in Rural Ontario

- **Building relationships** with the First Nations, and Métis and Indigenous organizations helps to address common concerns, advance mutual interests and to improve service delivery to indigenous residents.
- ROMA will work with AMO to ensure municipal perspectives are reflected in Ontario's review of **Indigenous Consultation Guidelines.**