

FINAL

AMO President Address to Delegates:

**Lynn Dollin, President, AMO
Deputy Mayor, Town of Innisfil**

2017 ROMA Conference

**Tuesday January 31, 9:20 a.m.
Grand Ballroom Centre and West
Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel
Toronto, Ontario**

(Check Against Delivery)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I think we can agree that ROMA's first stand-alone conference has been tremendous.

The conference theme is ROMA Speaks. For the past two days, ROMA has spoken. Provincial leaders, their Federal peers, public servants, MPs and MPPs have all been here to listen. We hope they've been paying close attention.

It has been two days of focused discussion about what matters most to rural municipalities and there is still more to come.

I have been reflecting upon Doug Griffith's message – and his 13 ways to kill your community. There were common threads in the good advice he gave:

Be positive
View a glass half full, rather than a glass half empty
Work together and cooperate
Look outward, not inward

This is good advice for the leaders of all communities -- urban, rural and First Nations.

Ontario will only move forward if all achieve their full potential.

ROMA is a community. We are all part of it.

AMO is a community. You are one of us as well.

Together we must strive to create win-wins, so that in the end, all of our communities triumph.

That is what this conference is all about.

FINAL

There are many faces to rural Ontario. From hamlets in the north to amalgamated communities like mine, Innisfil.

While we total 35,000 residents, we are spread out over 248 square kilometres, we have small urban pockets and broad rural areas. Our Council needs to work on behalf of all parts.

That's the role of municipal associations too. Our Boards must build consensus and develop positions with enough flexibility to reflect our differences.

It is not just what is good for your own municipality. It is about how we knit all of our perspectives together. It's not necessarily easy. But frankly, it is better to do this work ourselves, rather than have someone else do it for us. Or rather – do it *to* us!

There are many shared priorities and much common ground. It's about understanding what is in everyone's best interest; and advocating hard so municipalities can continue to build strong communities and create a strong Ontario.

That is why we work hand-in-hand on policy matters with ROMA and all of the many municipal peer groups across the Province. Together we are part of the municipal sector machine. If well-oiled and coordinated, it's hard to ignore.

I share your frustration that we've not seen progress on a number of issues.

Let's recognize that we would have addressed them all by now – if we had the authority to do it.

So we advocate for change as best we can. We do our homework, and we press on.

Ontarians pay the highest policing costs in the country.

Per capita, in 2014-2015, we spent at least \$20 more than Albertans, \$38 more than Quebecers, and \$58 more than British Columbians.

Like much of our work, the Policing Modernization Report came out of a broad-based Task Force. Nearly half the members were from town and townships and it included both OPP communities and those with their own forces.

We've been neck deep in promoting 34 recommendations focused on two categories: managing demand for services and increasing operational effectiveness. We are now anxious to see how well the Province has listened.

If they have not listened well enough, we will keep pressing.

The issue of double-hatters is again rearing its head.

FINAL

Here's the short story. New legislation passed in 2015 offers some protection to any double hatter. This protection was limited though, because provincial governments of all stripes have shied away from an outright law protecting these people from union intimidation.

Bill 109 does not stop a union from bringing one of their own members up on charges for violating the union constitution, and then fining them in the thousands of dollars if deemed guilty.

Bill 109 does offer these volunteers a legal process to protect their full-time job. But this process still means that they have to fight to protect their job. They have to stare down a possible lawsuit by the union to collect on what we think is a penalty for being a good citizen.

Risking your job, paying massive fines – that's intimidating. Who can blame them from turning in their volunteer gear?

In a world where firefighters are known to take on all kinds of second jobs, these bully tactics are misguided, wrong and unacceptable.

Double hatters do more than just respond to calls. They bring valuable experience and leadership to our rural fire halls.

It is absurd that the union tries to prevent professional firefighters from battling a blaze in their home community.

And quite frankly, it puts smaller and rural communities at risk, and for that, there is no excuse.

We'll continue to fight back on behalf of our volunteer firefighters and ensure that all communities benefit from high-quality, affordable firefighting services.

If you want to help the recently charged double hatters, they have a Go Fund Me Campaign to help with their legal costs. It's called support our two hatters.

If everyone here contributes \$10.00 they would reach their defense goal in a short period of time. And what a loud response that would make.

They support us when we need them. We should support them. It's our turn.

(pause)

Infrastructure is another matter that is top of mind.

We all know what we need. Generally speaking, it's a lot – from aging roads and bridges to the critical need for clean water, broadband and expansion of natural gas.

FINAL

There's not a lot of evidence that the 10-year, \$60 billion infrastructure deficit has shrunk much over the past decade.

However, we are seeing some real progress in federal and provincial support for infrastructure investment.

We were pleased this fall when the federal and provincial governments announced \$845 million for ALL Ontario municipalities with for water, wastewater and stormwater systems.

Funding is based on a formula, not an onerous application process that can keep many smaller communities out of the running. This was a critical victory.

It's a great precedent and we will continue to press for funds that benefit everyone, rather than the few.

Everyone understands the need to invest in infrastructure.

Our residents and businesses see the needs in their own communities – whether it's deteriorating roads, closed bridges or poor internet access.

In a Nanos Research poll conducted for AMO, nine out of 10 people said that maintaining safe infrastructure is an important priority, that the same number said municipal services are important to their daily lives.

Yet, province-wide, if we continue along our current path, raise property taxes and user fees by the rate of inflation, and maintain current federal and provincial transfers, we'd still be short about \$4.9 billion annually in order to fix infrastructure over 10 years.

It's not only infrastructure. There has been a piling on of other stresses on municipal budgets. For some, rural budgets have been hit with increased OPP billings. For some it is a decreased OMPF grant. For all, increased costs for everything from energy to insurance. Rural communities don't have the tax base to support these pressures.

This is a challenge and it needs a solution that is long-serving.

I've shared only a small portion of AMO's work on today's pressing issues. But as you hopefully heard yesterday, AMO is also focused on the future and What's Next for Ontario communities – and how to close that widening fiscal gap.

Do we expect property taxes to pick up this burden? There is a limit to what the property tax base can bear.

FINAL

Do we expect the Province to upload more services? Nice but unlikely. Even with the 2008 upload agreement, municipalities are still funding subsidized child care and social housing – costs that shouldn't be borne by property taxpayers.

Do we want to cut services? Pretty tough to do when we must mitigate climate events, manage an aging population and strained infrastructure.

It's been said before and worth repeating: we face the challenge of providing 21st century services with a 19th century revenue toolkit.

At the AMO Conference back in August, the Premier expressed an openness to looking at municipal finance mechanisms.

We have a moment here. An opportunity.

It's important that we work together across the municipal community and speak with a single, forceful voice on this issue.

Just across the street, Toronto is looking at its future challenges, even with the revenue tools that no one else has. Their discussions are helping to advance our shared concerns about the future.

The AMO Board has been working hard to craft a modern fiscal framework. We've been crisscrossing the province over the last year, meeting with local government reps. We've done webinars, issued papers, done polling, and analyzed a wide range of options.

A new vision and fiscal framework for municipal government will be shared with you in the coming months. So please stay tuned. We'll need your support.

I know you get a lot of information and emails coming at you faster than you can blink. BUT – please, don't skip over AMO's pieces. If you are not in the know, not up to date – then rural Ontario won't speak effectively.

I am confident that this event will reinforce and magnify the challenges and opportunities facing rural Ontario.

There is nothing like coming together with peers to learn and listen.

There is nothing like sitting face-to-face with provincial leaders to share your priorities, and hearing directly from them about theirs.

So thank you. Thank you for your participation and for being engaged in this important dialogue. We will be keeping this conversation going in the months to come.

FINAL

Enjoy the rest of your morning and I look forward to seeing you all at the AMO Conference this summer in Ottawa!