



The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Chief Administrative Officer
Report: #2024-COW-8
Date: February 14, 2024

Subject:

Government Relations 2024 Priorities

Recommendation:

That the Committee of the Whole recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview to Council of the 2024 government relations priority advocacy files as well as planned key advocacy activities.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Region's government relations advocacy activities aim to build relationships to strengthen opportunities for future partnerships, raise awareness of Regional issues, and secure senior-government funding, policy changes or other supports that advance Durham's priorities.
- 2.2 The identification of advocacy priorities is guided by the Strategic Plan, Regional Council direction, emerging issues, and funding opportunities.
- 2.3 The execution of government relations activities is managed by one designated staff person and is coordinated between the Regional Chair, members of Council, the CAO, and senior staff.
- 2.4 A variety of advocacy tactics are employed to achieve strategic government relations objectives.

- 2.5 In 2023, 19 government relations priorities were advanced. Highlights include,
- a. Introduction of a GO Station Contribution Fee through Bill 131;
 - b. Restoration of the Greenbelt lands;
 - c. An additional \$12.5 million in provincial funding for the North Pickering Long-Term Care Home;
 - d. A Homelessness Prevention Program funding increase that was above the provincial average; and
 - e. A top up to federal Reaching Home homelessness funding in 2023-24.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 An annual update on 2023 government relations activities was provided in [2023-INFO-104](#).

4. Government Relations Strategies 2024

- 4.1 The Region undertakes regular ongoing engagement and advocacy activities to strengthen relationships with partners within other levels of government and advance strategic goals.
- 4.2 Advocacy tactics can be executed at the political level by the Regional Chair or Regional Councillors or on a staff-to-staff level. Specific advocacy tactics include:
- a. Meetings with Durham MPs and MPPs
 - b. Letters to Ministers or senior public servants
 - c. Meetings with Ministers or senior public servants
 - d. Formal feedback (e.g., pre-Budget submissions, Environmental Registry of Ontario submissions, Standing Committee submissions)
 - e. Participation in pre-budget consultations
 - f. Minister delegations at conferences (e.g. AMO, ROMA and OGRA conferences)
 - g. Informal networking at announcements and events
 - h. Roundtable discussions
 - i. Regular staff-level meetings with MP and MPP offices
 - j. Development of public-facing advocacy materials e.g. Chair statements, Durham.ca content, the development of policy papers, etc.
 - k. Strategic use of local media including media articles
 - l. Interviews with the local and national media
 - m. Leverage public events as appropriate e.g. Regional Chair addresses, Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance's annual Regional CAOs address, etc.
 - n. Participation in joint advocacy efforts on broader issues via staff and Regional elected official participation in associations and networks such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario (MARCO), the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Mayors and Chairs, the Municipal

- Government Relations Network (MGRN), the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), and others
- o. Participation by senior staff in province-wide associations of like-professionals representing regional and single tier municipalities, e.g. Planning Commissioners, Works Commissioners, Finance Commissioners, Chief Administrative Officers, Paramedic Chiefs, Medical Officers of Health and others
- 4.3 The specific advocacy tactics used to advance a file considers a number of factors including desired outcomes, government position on the issue, known upcoming engagement opportunities, alignment with other stakeholders, and the urgency and potential impacts of the issue.
- 4.4 Staff develop specific advocacy plans for each of the priority files. Advocacy plans identify the key stakeholders, engagement opportunities, advocacy tactics and planned timelines.
- 4.5 Strategy Corp is registered to act as a lobbyist on behalf of the Region at the provincial and federal levels.
- 4.6 Strategy Corp's lobbying activities include leveraging their extensive network to undertake intelligence gathering, education and building buy-in on Regional approaches with key Minister's Office staff and securing meetings with elected decision-makers to advance Regional priorities.
- 4.7 In 2024, Strategy Corp is organizing a first Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park. At the Durham Advocacy Day, meetings will be sought with key Ministers and Ministers' Office staff to advance discussions on various regional priorities.
- 4.8 Departments typically lead the development of grant funding applications relevant to their programs with support from other departments as required. Strategic government relations advocacy is used to build support and awareness of Regional grant applications with significant potential to advance strategic goals.
- a. Advocacy activities to advance grant applications can include information-sharing with staff offices, meetings or correspondence with local MPPs or MPs, meetings with relevant Ministers or government lobbying via Strategy Corp.

5. 2024 Government Relations Priorities

- 5.1 In 2024, government relations priorities identified reflect the Strategic Plan goals, ongoing priorities from 2023 and anticipated areas of required advocacy. Priorities will continue to evolve to meet emerging issues.
- 5.2 Table 1 outlines the current top five advocacy files that will be priorities for advancement in 2024. The top five advocacy files for 2024 are:

- a. Increasing support for homelessness, mental health and addictions including 1635 Dundas
 - b. Progressing mixed-use housing projects at the Ritson School site and 590/650 Rossland Road
 - c. Advancing long-term financial sustainability
 - d. Addressing the impacts of Bill 23
 - e. Advancing GO Lakeshore East Extension to Bowmanville
- 5.3 Each priority includes some details on planned government relations strategies to advance the issue. Staff lead the setting up and arranging of meetings, drafting of advocacy materials including letters and meeting materials and recommending key messaging.
- 5.4 In 2024, Strategy Corp's core priorities will include Durham Region's GO Lakeshore East Station strategy, homelessness, mental health and addictions supports, and addressing Bill 23 impacts. In addition, Strategy Corp is expected to provide engagement and advocacy services on other emerging issues as requested.
- 5.5 In addition to the top priority files, staff will actively work to advance many other key files currently identified for 2024. The desired outcomes for these files include:
- a. Reduced paramedic offload delays
 - b. Increased community paramedicine funding and sustainable Primary Care Outreach Program funding (PCOP)
 - c. Establishment of an urgent care mental health unit in Durham
 - d. Support for a new Lakeridge Health hospital in Durham
 - e. Updated funding envelope for public health to meet provincial standards
 - f. Investments in community housing and transitional housing renewal
 - g. Funding for Durham's expenses for supporting asylum seekers and refugees
 - h. Provincial action on increasing access to family doctors in Durham
 - i. Advancement of the Durham Scarborough Bus Rapid Transit project
 - j. Inclusion of a High Frequency Rail Stop in Durham
 - k. Investments in transit operations and DRT's fleet expansion and electrification
 - l. Stabilization of two-tier government in Durham Region
- 5.6 Staff will actively monitor for developments on a number of other files of regional interest (e.g. Permanent Public Transit Fund development); leveraging advocacy opportunities that present themselves.
- 5.7 Council will be kept up to date on regional advocacy through the CAO's monthly briefing note and will continue to be copied on all letters and receive periodic briefing notes.
- 5.8 Progress made on government relations priorities will be tracked and outcomes reported on in the annual Government Relations Update report.

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

- a. Goal 5: Service Excellence. Objective: To provide exceptional value to Durham taxpayers through responsive, effective, and fiscally sustainable service delivery.
 - 5.1 Optimize resources and partnerships to deliver exceptional quality services and value.
 - 5.3 Demonstrate commitment to continuous quality improvement and communicating results.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Government relations files in 2024 align with Regional priorities and will continue to adapt to meet the needs of addressing emerging issues.
- 7.2 Supports for homelessness mental health and addictions including 1635 Dundas, Bill 23, GO East Lakeshore extension, long-term financial sustainability and mixed-income housing projects are top priority government relations files in 2024.
- 7.3 In addition to priority files, staff will work to advance a number of files across diverse areas in 2024. A variety of advocacy tactics will be employed to advance files including the strategic use of government lobbying.
- 7.4 Advocacy and engagement results achieved will be reported back to Council through the annual Government Relations Update in December 2024. Government relations updates will also be provided through the CAO's monthly briefing note and period briefing notes to Council.
- 7.5 For additional information, contact: Alison Burgess, Director Communications and Engagement, at Alison.Burgess@durham.ca or 289-830-9474.

8. Attachments

Attachment #1:

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Government Relations Tactics
Increased support to address homelessness, mental health and addictions crises including 1635 Dundas	<p>Provincial</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased investment in income programs and homelessness supports (e.g. Homelessness Prevention Funding). 2. Partnership with the province for the renovation and operations of phase one and two of 1635 Dundas St. East. 3. Implementation of earnings exemptions to the Ontario Works program like the Ontario Disability Support Program. <p>Federal</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Declaration of homelessness, mental health and addictions as an emergency. 5. Increased investment in income and homelessness supports (e.g. Reaching Home, Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit). 6. Investments into Durham housing projects across the housing continuum including capital investment in 1635 Dundas. 7. Increased investment in mental health and addictions support across the care continuum. 	<p>Raise local awareness of the issues through meetings and tours with Durham MPPs/MPs and local mayors, leveraging Durham Region's Addressing Homelessness and Related Challenges Policy Paper.</p> <p>Letters and follow-up meetings with the appropriate Ministers supported by regular staff-level meetings with senior ministry staff.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park.</p> <p>Delegation request at AMO.</p> <p>Provincial and federal pre-budget submissions.</p> <p>Influence, align with and amplify stakeholder groups and associations e.g. AMO, OMSSA and FCM.</p> <p>Work with local municipalities and community partners on joint advocacy efforts.</p> <p>Selective use of media to highlight the issues.</p> <p>Identify and apply to applicable funding streams.</p> <p>Dedicated priority file for the Region's government relations consultant Strategy Corp.</p>

Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Government Relations Tactics
<p>Progressing mixed-use housing projects at Ritson School site and 590/650 Rossland Road</p>	<p>Provincial</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partnership is established with the province and adjacent provincial lands are leveraged to realise full project potential (Rossland Rd only). 2. The number of planned new housing units, including affordable housing units is met. 3. Funding is identified to advance the projects in a timely fashion as appropriate. <p>Federal</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Partnership is established with the federal government and investment in housing projects is identified. 	<p>Raise local awareness of the projects and create champions through meetings with Durham MPPs/MPs and local mayors.</p> <p>Letters and follow-up meetings with the appropriate Ministers supported by regular staff-level meetings with senior ministry staff.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park.</p> <p>Delegation request at AMO.</p> <p>Provincial and federal pre-budget submissions.</p> <p>Work with local municipalities and community partners on joint advocacy efforts.</p> <p>Identify and apply to applicable funding streams including the Affordable Housing Fund.</p> <p>Dedicated priority file for the Region's government relations consultant Strategy Corp.</p>

Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Government Relations Tactics
Advancing Long-Term Financial Sustainability	<p>Provincial</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New provincial funding arrangement to recognize impacts of senior level government policy changes, shifting responsibilities between levels of government, growing community needs (e.g. infrastructure investment and social services) and the inadequacy of municipal revenue tools. <p>Federal</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. A federal infrastructure fund and a permanent transit fund that meets Durham's growth infrastructure needs is announced. 	<p>Raise local awareness of the financial realities and issues through meetings with Durham MPPs/MPs and local mayors.</p> <p>Letters and follow-up meetings with the appropriate Ministers supported by regular staff-level meetings with senior ministry staff.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park.</p> <p>Delegation request at AMO.</p> <p>Provincial and federal pre-budget submissions.</p> <p>Influence, align with and amplify stakeholder groups and associations e.g. AMO, MTCO, MARCO and FCM.</p> <p>Selective use of media and other tools to highlight the issues and educate the public on the need for new funding arrangements.</p>

Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Government Relations Tactics
Addressing Impacts of Bill 23	<p>Provincial</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provincial legislative changes or new funding stream restores lost revenue. 2. Funding required for housing-enabling infrastructure is obtained. 3. Bill 23 components related to removal of regional official plans are not enacted. 	<p>Raise local awareness of the financial realities and issues through meetings with Durham MPPs and local mayors.</p> <p>Letters and follow-up meetings with the appropriate Ministers supported by regular staff-level meetings with senior ministry staff.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park.</p> <p>Delegation request at AMO.</p> <p>Provincial pre-budget submission.</p> <p>Influence, align with and amplify stakeholder groups and associations e.g. AMO, MTCO and RPCO.</p> <p>Work with local municipalities and community partners on joint advocacy efforts.</p> <p>Selective use of media to highlight the issues.</p> <p>Identify and apply to applicable funding streams including the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund.</p>

Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Government Relations Tactics
Advancing GO Lakeshore East Extension	<p>Provincial</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provincial regulations include the conditions of success for station delivery. 2. Continued momentum on the delivery of Lakeshore Go East. 	<p>Raise local awareness of the projects and create champions through meetings with Durham MPPs and local mayors.</p> <p>Letters and follow-up meetings with the appropriate Ministers supported by regular staff-level meetings with senior ministry staff.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park.</p> <p>Delegation request at AMO.</p> <p>Work with local municipalities and community partners on joint advocacy efforts.</p> <p>Dedicated priority file for the Region's government relations consultant Strategy Corp.</p>