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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Chief Administrative Officer
Report: #2023-COW-5
Date: January 18, 2023

Subject:

Durham Region Government Relations Update

Recommendation:

That the Committee of the Whole recommends to Regional Council:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on key government relations activities and outcomes for 2022.

2. Background

2.1 The Region undertakes intergovernmental advocacy to advance regional priorities. Advocacy priorities are guided by the Strategic Plan, Regional Council direction, emerging issues, and funding opportunities.

2.2 Government relations activities support a framework with three key objectives:

- a. Align and Communicate Regional Priorities
- b. Build Awareness and Support with Upper Levels of Government
- c. Create Alignment with Local Municipalities

2.3 Intergovernmental exchanges occur at an elected official to elected official level (e.g., regional elected officials engaging with MPPs and MPs, including Ministers) or through staff-to-staff meetings and discussions (e.g. CAO to Deputy Ministers).

- Engagement can include meetings, letters, and official feedback (e.g., pre-budget submissions, Environmental Registry of Ontario submissions).
- 2.4 Government relations activities are supported and strengthened through staff and Regional elected official participation in associations 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, and others.
- 2.5 The execution of government relations activities is coordinated between the Regional Chair, members of Council, the CAO, and staff. In 2022, Strategy Corp, a governmental relations consulting firm, continued to work as a registered lobbyist on the Region's behalf to advance key provincial files.
- 2.6 On an annual basis, the actions and performance metrics to support each of the three key objectives of the government relations framework are determined. At the end of the year, the data is analyzed to understand the impact of the actions in achieving the government relations objectives.
- 2.7 Regional Council is updated on key government relations activities through the CAO's monthly update briefing note and through periodic Council reports as appropriate.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 An update of 2021 government relations activities was provided in [#2021-INFO-134](#).

4. Highlights of 2022 Government Relations Activities

- 4.1 The Regional Chair and Regional staff cultivated effective working relationships with municipal, provincial, and federal counterparts to build awareness and support of the Region's key priorities with upper levels of government.
- 4.2 In 2022, key Regional advocacy issues included:
- The Lakeshore GO East extension to Bowmanville and planning for Transit Oriented Communities;
 - Social and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - Support for the most vulnerable including funding for supportive housing, addressing homelessness, mental health and addictions;
 - Removal of tolls on 412/418 highways;
 - Support for paramedic services including continued funding for community paramedicine programs, dedicated offload nursing programs and addressing paramedic offload delays in Durham;
 - Increased capacity for long-term care; and

- Provincial housing plans including Bill 23 and development in the Greenbelt.

There were 25 priorities identified in 2022 including those identified at the beginning of the year and those added throughout the year due to policy changes, arising issues or new funding opportunities. The Region advanced 15 priorities with the provincial and federal governments in 2022. Advocacy was primarily focused on areas of provincial responsibility. The target was to advance 10 priorities and this metric was achieved despite the timing of the provincial and municipal election cycles that impacted the ability to advocate.

Provincial Engagement

4.3 The Regional Chair and Regional staff met formally with MPPs, Ministers and their staff on 15 occasions throughout the year in addition to the many informal discussions at meetings, announcements, and events. This exceeded the target of 11 formal engagements with Durham MPPs and Ministers. The Region also issued ten letters to provincial representatives. Highlights of advocacy outcomes include:

- Engaged with AdvantAge Ontario and directly advocated to the Minister of Long-Term Care for increased sector funding to address construction cost escalations for long-term care home projects.
- Met with the Minister of Infrastructure to advance work on planning the stations for the Lakeshore GO East Extension to Bowmanville.
- Increased awareness of the challenges resulting from increasing paramedic offload delays by arranging a presentation from the Paramedic Chiefs of Ontario to MARCO and Ontario Big City Mayors (OBCM) and through a Regional delegation with the Ontario Minister of Health.
- Communicated Regional waste management priorities through a meeting with Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.
- Fostered positive working relationships with MPPs through regular staff-level meetings. Strengthened relationships are evident through the inclusion of Regional representatives at provincial funding announcements hosted in Durham Region.
- Presented Durham Region's clean energy investment potential to the Ministry of Energy to increase awareness of the Region as the Clean Energy Capital of Canada. The Minister of Energy subsequently referred to Durham Region as the Clean Energy Capital of Canada in Question Period, demonstrating traction of the Region's messaging.
- Provided feedback on the implications of Bill 23 and changes to the Greenbelt including letters to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. There was active participation in various professional and municipal associations to ensure Durham Region's concerns with the policy changes were documented.

- Aligned with other local voices resulting in the removal of tolls on the 412/418 highways.

Federal Engagement

4.4 The Regional Chair and staff also work to build effective working relationships at the federal level. In 2022, fewer of the Region's priorities were related to federal responsibilities, however, the Regional Chair and CAO continue to meet formally with MPs, Ministers and their staff and send advocacy letters to support the Region's priorities. Highlights of these advocacy efforts include:

- Additional \$562.2 million in the 2022 federal budget provided over two years, beginning in 2024-25, to maintain Reaching Home's 2023-24 funding levels, reflecting the Region's pre-budget submission to maintain funding.
- Advocated for flexible funding through the consultation process for the permanent public transit fund.
- Created alignment with other municipalities through staff-level engagement in joint GTHA advocacy efforts to secure pandemic recovery funding and increased federal supports for Ukrainian newcomers.
- Advocated to the federal government for funding for broadband initiatives.
- Collaborated with the City of Pickering to develop a strategic business case for a High Frequency Rail stop in north Pickering.
- Through the GTHA Regional Prosperity Alliance, met with the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and senior staff from Infrastructure Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to discuss greater collaboration on housing and homelessness.
- Raised awareness of the Durham Greener Homes program with federal MPs and highlighted the support from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

5. Government Relations Priorities for 2023

5.1 Based on Council-approved strategies and current challenges, the Region's government relations activities for 2023 will focus on the following priorities:

a. Responding to provincial housing plans, including Bill 23:

- Continuing to seek opportunities to meaningfully engage in consultation with the province;
- Securing financial supports to mitigate the financial impacts of Bill 23 and increased infrastructure funding required to achieve housing targets;

- Confirming the commitment from the province that the Upper York Sewage Solution decision is revenue neutral to Durham Region ratepayers and taxpayers; and
 - Confirming with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing that the Region can extend its existing Development Charges By-Law.
- b. Continuing to advance the Lakeshore GO East Extension to Bowmanville including the Station Implementation Strategy.
 - c. Partnering with local area municipalities to provide input to provincial facilitators on Bill 39.
 - d. Advocating for supports to deliver on the goals of the community safety and well-being plan including support for homelessness, mental health and addictions, and community safety.
 - e. Requesting funding to support transit service expansion through Durham Region Transit and higher order transit projects including the bus rapid transit and the high frequency rail stop.
 - f. Investing in paramedic services including permanent paramedicine funding and support for addressing offload delays.
 - g. Advancing the Region's long-term waste management strategy with the Ministry of the Environment Conservation and Parks.
 - h. Continuing to advocate and monitor ongoing priorities including long-term waste management, support for Ukrainian arrivals response, broadband expansion, and action on climate change.
- 5.2 Identified priorities will inform the Region's overall advocacy strategies in 2023, however, staff will continue to respond to emerging issues and funding opportunities as they arise.

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 In 2022, significant progress was made towards advancing key files and increasing the provincial and federal governments' awareness of Durham Region's unique strengths.
- 7.2 Regional staff will continue to work with local, provincial, and federal counterparts to advance shared priorities and achieve positive economic and social impacts for Durham residents in 2023.
- 7.3 Regional staff will continue to monitor updates in the local, provincial, and federal landscapes and respond to emerging issues and opportunities.
- 7.4 Report prepared by: Bronwyn Hannelas, Policy Advisor and Alison Burgess, Manager, Corporate Initiatives.
- 7.5 Report approved by: Sandra Austin, Director, Strategic Initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,

Original Signed by

Elaine Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer