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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Chief Administrative Officer
Report: #2025-COW-1
Date: January 15, 2025

Subject:

Government Relations 2024 Update and 2025 Priorities

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 overview to Council on 2024 government relations accomplishments and the 2025 government relations priority advocacy files as well as planned key advocacy activities.

2. Background

2.1 Durham Region's government relations efforts focus on fostering connections and relationships to enhance partnership opportunities with other levels of government. Regional concerns are highlighted, and advocacy for funding, policy adjustments, and support from senior government levels is pursued to further Durham's priorities, while collaborating with our local area municipalities.

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 two dedicated staff and is coordinated between the Regional Chair, members of Council, the CAO, and senior staff.

- 2.4 Government relations activities are strengthened through 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), Regional and Single Tier CAOs, the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Mayors and Chairs, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), and others.
- 2.5 Intergovernmental engagement includes meetings, letters, and formal feedback (e.g., pre-budget submissions, Environmental Registry of Ontario submissions, consultations, Standing Committee submissions).
- 2.6 Regional Council is updated on key government relations activities through the CAO's monthly briefing note update and through periodic Council reports.
- 2.7 On an annual basis, planned actions to support key objectives of the government relations priorities are identified and tracked. At the end of the year, the outputs and outcomes are analyzed and used to plan for the following year.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 In December 2024, [a presentation to Council](#) highlighted 2024 government relations activities.
- 3.2 An annual report on government relations priorities for 2024 was provided in Report [#2024-COW-8](#).

4. Highlights of 2024 Government Relations Actions and Outcomes

- 4.1 In 2024, the Government Relations team worked on 28 different issues and made significant progress on several key priorities. The highlights of the actions taken and the outcomes achieved are outlined in Attachment #1.
- 4.2 The Regional Chair, Regional Councillors and Regional staff met with MPPs, Ministers and their staff on 29 occasions including five AMO delegations and participation in pre-budget consultations. This compares to 18 times in the 2023 and exceeds the target that was set to meet government relations objectives.
- 4.3 Formal engagement was augmented by lobby interactions led by Strategy Corp and many information discussions at meetings, announcements, and events.
- 4.4 In 2024, Strategy Corp priorities were the advancement of Durham Region's GO Lakeshore East Station strategy and homelessness, mental health and addictions supports. In addition to these core priorities, Strategy Corp provided engagement and advocacy services on other emerging issues as requested.
- 4.5 A notable area of improvement in 2024 was the adoption of a more sophisticated approach to government relations meetings. It was ensured that all participants,

including staff, political staffers, and elected officials were fully briefed on the meetings objectives beforehand. This comprehensive approach, made possible with a two-person dedicated team, fosters consensus-building and has led to more productive discussions and improved outcomes.

4.6 The government's relations team supports department's work on key grant applications through advocacy to promote successful grant applications. Additionally, in 2024 the government relations team provided coordination support on five strategic cross-departmental grant applications related to housing, homelessness, mental health and addictions.

4.7 In 2024, the Region achieved significant funding success including:

- a. \$34.9 million, the maximum funding available, under the provincial Housing Enabling Water Systems fund, for the renovation of the Oshawa Water Supply Plant.
- b. \$6.4 million in capital funding from the federal Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampment Initiative for Phase 2 of 1635 Dundas Street East.
- c. Frequent Builder Status from Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) which includes up to \$330 million ear-marked for Regional housing projects contingent upon successful application(s).
- d. \$16.6 million from the province for the both the temporary and permanent bridge structures of the Beaver River Bridge.
- e. A 9 per cent increase to land ambulance funding.

5. Government Relations 2025

5.1 Government relations priorities for 2025 are informed by ongoing priorities from 2024 and anticipated opportunities and challenges.

5.2 Priorities will continue to evolve in response to emerging opportunities and challenges including potential revised mandates from federal and provincial governments.

5.3 Given anticipated elections in 2025 at both the provincial and federal level, the Region's advocacy will leverage pre-election periods and deploy post-election strategies to ensure new Ministers and any newly elected MP and MPPs are aware of the Region's top priorities.

5.4 Specific activities anticipated for 2025 include a Queen's Park Advocacy Day with the Chair and relevant mayors, targeted joint advocacy with Regional Chairs, post-election meetings with key Ministers and alignment with MARCO and AMO on sector-wide issues.

5.5 In 2025, the Region is continuing with the services of Strategy Corp to advance key priorities. Strategy Corp's main priorities will include GO Lakeshore East Station strategy, homelessness, mental health and addictions supports including

securing operating funding for 1635 Dundas Phase 2. Another key focus will be assisting with the development and deployment of pre- and post-elections strategies.

5.6 Attachment 2 outlines the current top four advocacy files that will be priorities for advancement in 2025 as follows:

- a. Increasing support for homelessness, mental health and addictions
- b. Securing operating and capital funding for 1635 Dundas Phase 2
- c. Advancing the GO Lakeshore East Extension to Bowmanville
- d. Advancing long-term financial sustainability including adequate capital investment for growth
- e. Investments in community housing and transitional housing renewal

5.7 In addition to top priority files, work will be done in 2025 to advance the following desired key outcomes:

- a. Increased community paramedicine funding and sustainable Primary Care Outreach Program (PCOP) funding
- b. Establishment of an urgent care mental health unit in Durham
- c. Provincial action on increasing access to family doctors in Durham
- d. Advancement of the Durham Scarborough Bus Rapid Transit project
- e. A comprehensive federal approach to support refugees and asylum seekers
- f. Funding for community safety and well-being initiatives
- g. Addressing the rising costs of policing
- h. Senior government clean energy investments in Durham Region
- i. Investments in transit including fleet electrification and service expansion
- j. The removal of tolls on provincial-owned portion of Highway 407
- k. Reform to the bail system

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 2024, many key government relations files were advanced with positive funding impacts and improving the well-being of residents.
- 7.2 2025 priorities reflect a continuation of key priorities from 2024 including the GO Lakeshore East extension station strategy, supports for homelessness, mental health and addictions and improving financial sustainability.
- 7.3 Priorities and tactics in 2025 will likely be impacted by anticipated elections at the provincial and federal levels of government. Post-election strategies will be deployed to position the Region for success in advancing desired government relations outcomes.

8. Attachments

Attachment #1: [2024 Government Relations Outcomes](#)

Attachment #2: [2025 Government Relations Priorities](#)

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment #1: 2024 Government Relations Outcomes

2024 Priority	Ask	Actions/Engagement	Outcomes in 2024
<p>Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions including 1635 Dundas St. E.</p>	<p>Advocate for capital and operating funds for 1635 Dundas St. E.</p> <p>Advocacy for increased funds to bring additional programs to Durham.</p> <p>Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) funding increase.</p>	<p>Created an advocacy strategy for 1635 Dundas that included the development of key messaging and materials, ongoing promotion to Durham MPPs and MPs, promotion of the project with key federal and provincial Ministers including tours and AMO delegations.</p> <p>Coordination support and promotion of several grant applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HART Hub Funding for a joint proposal with Durham Community Health Centre including supportive housing at 1635 Dundas. • CMHC Rapid Housing application for 1635 Dundas Phase 2. • Wrote and coordinated proposal for the Emergency Treatment Fund to launch a Mobile Opioid Outreach Team. • Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampment Initiative. 	<p>Secured \$6.4 million for 1635 Dundas Phase 2 through the federal Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampment Initiative.</p> <p>CMHC Frequent Builder Status awarded including up to \$330 million earmarked for the Region’s housing projects contingent upon successful application(s).</p> <p>A one-time top-up of Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit funding to assist 40 additional individuals.</p> <p>Funding decisions are expected in the coming weeks for the federal Emergency Treatment Fund, federal CMHC Rapid Housing and provincial HART Hub programs.</p>

2024 Priority	Ask	Actions/Engagement	Outcomes in 2024
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encampment Response Initiative (Last Mile Funding support and endorsement was also provided to service providers). <p>Other activities included: pre-budget consultations; Minister Calandra roundtable; ongoing advocacy to local MPPs, Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park, Joint Regional Chair's Advocacy including meetings with Ministers of Health and Mental Health and Addictions, letters to the Prime Minister and Speaker of the House asking for a national homelessness summit and CAO meetings with Deputy Ministers at the provincial and federal levels.</p>	
Progressing mixed-use housing projects at the Ritson School site and 590/650 Rossland Road.	<p>Capital funding opportunities for mixed-income projects.</p> <p>Provincial cooperation to develop adjacent lands for the Rossland Road project.</p>	<p>AMO delegation with Minister Calandra.</p> <p>Meeting with key Minister Office's staff and Ministry staff.</p> <p>CAO meetings with federal and provincial Deputy Ministers.</p> <p>Staff meetings and CAO level meetings with senior CMHC staff.</p>	CMHC Frequent Builder Status awarded including up to \$330 million earmarked for the Region's housing projects contingent upon successful application(s).

2024 Priority	Ask	Actions/Engagement	Outcomes in 2024
		<p>Development of key message and materials to promote the projects with elected officials and Ministry staff.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen’s Park highlighted projects to the Associate Minister of Housing.</p>	
<p>Advancing long-term financial sustainability.</p>	<p>New provincial funding arrangement.</p> <p>A new federal infrastructure fund and a permanent public transit fund that meets Durham’s growth infrastructure needs.</p>	<p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen’s Park.</p> <p>Joint Regional Chair’s Advocacy including with Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities.</p>	<p>Durham Region received a positive funding decision on its application for base funding under the Permanent Public Transit Fund.</p> <p>Launch of the federal Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund.</p>
<p>Addressing the impacts of Bill 23.</p>	<p>Provincial legislative changes or new funding stream restores lost revenue.</p> <p>Funding required for housing-enabling infrastructure is obtained.</p> <p>Bill 23 components related to removal of</p>	<p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen’s Park.</p> <p>Pre-budget submission.</p> <p>Participation in sector responses e.g. AMO, FCM, RPCO, MTCO.</p> <p>Advocacy materials and engagement with Ministers’ Offices and local MPPs to highlight applications to the Housing-Enabling Water Systems</p>	<p>The phase-in component of Bill 23 which had the largest financial impact was reversed in June 2024.</p> <p>\$34.9 million received from the Housing Enabling Water Systems Fund.</p>

2024 Priority	Ask	Actions/Engagement	Outcomes in 2024
	regional official plans are not enacted.	Fund and Housing Enabling Core Servicing funding stream.	
Advancing GO Lakeshore East Extension to Bowmanville.	Enabling Transit Station Fee regulations passed.	<p>AMO delegation.</p> <p>Chair calls to the Minister of MOI.</p> <p>CAO conversations with DMs and Metrolinx CEO.</p> <p>Participation in staff-level working groups with MOI.</p> <p>Meetings with key Minister's Office staff.</p>	Discussions with staff about draft regulations.
Durham Regional Official Plan approval.	Approval of the Regional Official Plan.	<p>AMO delegation.</p> <p>Minister Calandra Roundtable with the Mayors and Chair and follow-up letters to the Minister.</p> <p>Staff-level engagement.</p> <p>Coordinated advocacy with local area municipalities.</p>	The Regional Official Plan was approved.
Reduced paramedic offload delays.	Provincial investments to reduce the amount of time paramedics spent in offload delays.	<p>Pre-budget submission.</p> <p>Alignment with sector-wide advocacy.</p>	Land ambulance funding increase of 9 per cent, which is above the provincial average.

2024 Priority	Ask	Actions/Engagement	Outcomes in 2024
Increased community paramedicine funding and sustainable Primary Care Outreach Program funding (PCOP).	Permanent funding for the community paramedicine program. Primary Care Outreach Team receives funding to expand hours.	AMO delegation. Pre-budget submission. Joint Regional Chairs advocacy on paramedicine.	New Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care Plus was launched with Region of Durham Paramedic Services one of six funding recipients in 2024.
Support for a new Lakeridge Health hospital in Durham.	The planning grant for a new Lakeridge Health hospital be awarded.	Pre budget consultation and written submission.	\$12 million in capital planning grants awarded to Lakeridge Health that will enable them to expand their capacity.
Strong family medicine for Durham residents.	Provincial action on increasing access to family doctors in Durham.	Motion asking province to support physician shortage passed by Council September 25.	New Primary Care Action Team announced by the province to connect all Ontarians to primary health care.
Reform of the bail system for repeat offenders.	Reforms to the bail system to address reoffences of drug trafficking and violent crimes.	Council motion seeking the province to declare Intimate Partner Violence an epidemic. Letter to the Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform.	A dedicated minister portfolio for bail reform was created by the province. The Criminal Code was amended to introduce a reverse onus on bail hearings for a violent offence.
Advancement of the Durham Scarborough Bus Rapid Transit (DSBRT).	Request for a staged approach. Funding made available to complete the DS-BRT.	Pre-budget consultation. Staff meetings with MTO. Engagement with local area municipalities.	Preliminary design business case (PDBC) released by Metrolinx, with 3 options including a stage approach. The Permanent Public Transit Fund Metro Agreement stream expressions of interest was launched.

2024 Priority	Ask	Actions/Engagement	Outcomes in 2024
<p>Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Durham.</p>	<p>Funding for Durham’s expenses for supporting asylum seekers and refugees.</p> <p>Opening of a Peel Reception Centre.</p> <p>Portable benefits for asylum seekers and refugees.</p>	<p>Regional Chair’s Advocacy.</p> <p>Joint Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Mayors and Chairs advocacy efforts.</p>	<p>Top-up increase to overall Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) funding envelope of \$362M compared to \$212M initial commitment.</p> <p>Durham reimbursement of 95% of costs incurred.</p> <p>The Peel Reception Centre received operating and capital funding to open.</p>

Attachment #2: 2025 Government Relations Priorities

2025 Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Planned Activities for 2025
<p>Increased support to address homelessness, mental health and addictions crises.</p>	<p>Provincial:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased to income support programs and earnings exemptions increases for Ontario Works recipients 2. Permanent increases to homelessness supports (e.g. Homelessness Prevention Funding, rent supplements) 3. Coordinated cross-ministry response to the crises including a single point of contact and the establishment of a task force 4. Accompanying operating funding to accompany new supportive housing <p>Federal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Increased investment in income and homelessness supports (e.g. make Reaching Home permanent and increase the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit). 5. Increased investment in mental health and addictions support across the care continuum. 	<p>Focus of the Region's post-election strategies.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park with mayors.</p> <p>Dedicated priority file for the Region's government relations consultant Strategy Corp.</p> <p>Delegation requests at AMO.</p> <p>Joint Regional Chairs advocacy.</p> <p>Provincial and federal pre-budget submissions.</p> <p>Identify and apply to applicable funding opportunities.</p> <p>Inform and align with AMO and FCM sector-based advocacy.</p>

2025 Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Planned Activities for 2025
Secure Operating and Capital Funding for Phase 2 of 1635 Dundas St. E.	Provincial: 1. Secure an ongoing increase to HPP funding to support 1635 operations. 2. Support partner agencies to secure funding to deliver programming at 1635 Dundas (e.g. palliative care). Federal: 1. Secure Rapid Housing funding for Phase 2 capital works at 1635 Dundas.	Focus of the Region's post-election strategies. Highlight the merits of Durham Region's Rapid Housing application for 1635 Dundas to decision makers. Dedicated priority file for the Region's government relations consultant Strategy Corp. Meeting with the Minister of MAH. Queens Park Advocacy Day. Delegation requests at AMO. Continue to build local support from MP/MPPs.
Advancing GO Lakeshore East Extension to Bowmanville	1. Transit Station Fee Regulations released 2. Public commitment for the project (e.g. announcements, inclusion in budget).	Focus of the Region's post-election strategies. Ongoing meetings with the Minister of MOI and MTO and key Ministers' Offices staff. CAO meetings with DMs and newly appointed Metrolinx CEO. Ongoing staff participation in MOI staff-level working group.

2025 Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Planned Activities for 2025
		<p>Work with local municipalities and community partners on joint advocacy efforts.</p> <p>Continue to demonstrate the Region’s support for the project.</p>
<p>Advancing long-term sustainability including adequate capital investment for growth.</p>	<p>Provincial:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New provincial funding arrangements (e.g. portion of the Land Transfer Tax) to recognize current municipal revenue sources inadequacy to address growing community needs such as infrastructure investment and social services. 2. New provincial capital growth funding opportunities. <p>Federal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Any new federal infrastructure funding for growth that reflects an understanding of two-tier municipal models and municipal revenue tools. 2. New federal funding arrangements (e.g. portion of the GST to recognize current municipal revenue sources inadequacy to address growing infrastructure needs). 	<p>Focus of the Region’s post-election strategies.</p> <p>Joint Regional Chair’s Advocacy.</p> <p>Influence, align with and amplify stakeholder groups and associations e.g. AMO, MARCO and FCM.</p> <p>Delegation requests at AMO.</p> <p>Pre-budget submissions.</p> <p>Durham Advocacy Day at Queen’s Park.</p> <p>Apply for funding opportunities as they become available.</p> <p>Ensure local MP/MPPs are aware of Durham’s limitations under the current funding arrangements and planned infrastructure projects.</p>

2025 Priority	Desired Advocacy Outcome(s)	Planned Activities for 2025
<p>Investments in community and transitional housing renewal.</p>	<p>Federal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capital funding renewal and expansion of Regional mixed income housing projects. 2. Maintain Affordable Housing Fund post-election or equivalent. <p>Provincial:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leverage adjacent lands (ex. 590 Rossland) 	<p>Focus of the Region’s post-election strategies.</p> <p>Highlight the Region’s various mixed use and mixed income housing projects including Malaga Rd, Christine Cres, Ritson School site and 590/650 Rossland Rd.</p> <p>Seek MP support for housing applications through CMHC. Raise awareness with local MPPs.</p>