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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Chief Administrative Officer
Report: #2025-INFO-54
Date: June 20, 2025

Subject:

Government Relations 2025 Mid-Year Update

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a mid-year update on 2025 government relations activities and highlight planned activities for the remainder of the year.
- 1.2 With the unexpected introduction of tariffs, an early provincial election, and a change in Prime Minister followed by a federal election, the political landscape has shifted and the priorities of both the provincial and federal government have changed. The government relations team has responded and updated the 2025 priorities and activities to effectively advance Durham Region's interests.

2. Background

- 2.1 Durham Region's government relations work is focused on building strong relationships with other levels of government to enhance partnership opportunities. We highlight Durham Region's projects and priorities, advocate for funding and policy changes that move Regional Council's priorities forward. We collaborate with our local area municipalities to align efforts.
- 2.2 Advocacy priorities are informed by the Strategic Plan, Regional Council direction, emerging issues, and funding opportunities.

- 2.3 The execution of government relations activities is overseen by the Director of Communications and Engagement and managed by two dedicated staff who coordinate with the Regional Chair, members of Council, the CAO, and senior staff.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 The 2025 government relations advocacy priorities were initially outlined in [Report #2025-COW-1](#), which was presented to Council earlier this year. That report includes a full overview of the team's activities and additional background information.
- 3.2 In December 2024, [a presentation to Council](#) highlighted 2024 government relations activities.

4. Activities of the Government Relations Team in 2025

- 4.1 The government relations team has actively advanced Council's advocacy priorities through a range of strategic initiatives.
- 4.2 Government relations staff support the Regional Chair and CAO in joint advocacy efforts with groups such as the Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario (MARCO) and Regional and Single Tier CAOs (RSTCAOs). This support includes research, preparing and facilitating related materials, and providing recommendations to guide engagement with upper levels of government. Staff also support Regional representatives on the Regional and Single Tier Caucus of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Board of Directors.
- 4.3 Regular meetings are held with area municipal government relations staff and constituency office staff from Durham MPP and MP offices. These meetings help ensure timely information sharing and foster strong, collaborative working relationships across all levels of government.
- 4.4 Government relations efforts are supported by our registered lobbyist, Strategy Corp Inc, who engage with internal ministry offices and staff on behalf of the Region of Durham. Their role includes providing strategic advice on our key issues, securing meetings, and facilitating connections.
- 4.5 Staff worked with MP Ryan Turnbull's office to host the federal Minister of Housing Infrastructure and Communities for a tour of 1635 Dundas St. E, showcasing the facility in support of Durham's application to the Affordable Housing Fund.
- 4.6 Following the provincial election, advocacy letters were sent to 10 key provincial Ministers outlining Durham's priorities and needs. With the support of Strategy Corp, five of these letters led to meetings during the Queen's Park advocacy event.

5. Durham Advocacy Day at Queen's Park 2025

- 5.1 Building on the success of Durham's first Advocacy Day in 2024, a more comprehensive event was planned for 2025.
- 5.2 The Regional Chair and CAO invited Durham Region Mayors, Regional Committee Chairs and AMO Regional Board members to join Advocacy Day at Queen's Park on May 26.
- 5.3 The theme for the day was "Investing in Durham is investing in Ontario's future." All meeting materials, signage and giveaways reflected this theme.
- 5.4 A reception was hosted at Queen's Park to showcase Durham Region's strengths and opportunities to all MPPs, with the goal of positioning the Region as a top consideration for future provincial funding and investment opportunities. Local Durham businesses from various municipalities were showcased.
- 5.5 Meeting with Premier Doug Ford and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Rob Flack:
 - a. Discussion topics included support for the province's tariff response, economic development opportunities in Durham (highlighting the recent delegation to Hannover Messe), housing enabling infrastructure, the GO East Extension and building housing in mixed income communities.
 - b. The Premier discussed his priorities of red tape reduction and his vision for the use of Bill 5, Protecting Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act.
 - c. Minister Flack discussed the use of development charges and the potential application of a Municipal Services Corporation (MSC) for water and wastewater infrastructure.
- 5.6 Meeting with Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Vijay Thanigasalam:
 - a. Advocacy focused on the need for greater support to address the intersection of homelessness, mental illness, and addictions including a dedicated mental health emergency room in Oshawa and regulations to enable treatment for individuals with severe mental illness and addictions.
- 5.7 Meeting with the Minister of Finance, Peter Bethlenfalvy:
 - a. Advocacy included the potential impacts of Bill 17 on development charges and housing-enabling infrastructure, the Region's ongoing housing projects, and the need for provincial partnership to build the GO East Extension stations. The province's current financial challenges were acknowledged.
- 5.8 Meeting with Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Graydon Smith:

- a. Advocacy covered current and planned housing developments, including current Durham Region Local Housing Corporation projects and the growing need for Homelessness Prevention Program funds to support wrap-around services for supportive and transitional housing. The costs associated with housing-enabling infrastructure were also highlighted. The Associate Minister shared the intent of Bill 17.

5.9 Meeting with Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform, Zee Hamid:

- a. Advocacy included the need for bail reform due to concerns about the impact of “catch and release” practices on policing resources, and the financial pressures associated with mandates under the Community Safety and Policing Act (CSPA). The need for additional provincial support to manage these costs was emphasized.

5.10 Meeting with the Minister of Transportation, Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:

- a. Advocacy focused on the benefits of progress on the GO East Extension and the urgent need to release regulations under the Transportation for the Future Act. The importance of sustained transit investment was also emphasized, with a recommendation to include projects like the Durham Scarborough Bus Rapid Transit project in future funding programs.

6. Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Conference 2025

6.1 CAO Elaine Baxter-Trahair, and the government relations team, attended the FCM conference in Ottawa. We leveraged the opportunity while in Ottawa to secure meetings with executive staff level representatives across various Ministries. These meetings provided an opportunity to advance Durham Region’s key priorities at the federal level.

6.2 In the four meetings with senior staff, we shared key priorities for housing, infrastructure, refugees and asylum seekers, and bail reform. The timing for these discussions was critical as federal staff are briefing new Ministers to set priorities for the new administration.

6.3 Meeting with Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (HICC):

- a. Met with the Director General to share the details of key housing initiatives, including 1635 Dundas St. East (104 supportive housing beds), 409 Centre Street, and the Ritson School Project.
- b. The success of 1635 Dundas St. East in transitioning individuals from shelter to housing was highlighted as a model for future projects.
- c. The Region’s strategic approach to housing—focusing on increasing density and diversifying housing options near transit—was discussed.
- d. HICC provided federal program insights, reaffirming support for the Affordable Housing Fund and clarifying CMHC’s role in housing delivery.

- e. Durham provided input on the creation of Build Canada Homes, reducing development charges, and homelessness support.

6.4 Meeting with Finance Canada:

- a. Met with the Director General to share the financial pressures facing municipalities.
- b. Durham outlined financial constraints related to infrastructure development and the impact of potential development charge reductions.
- c. Finance Canada acknowledged the challenges facing municipalities and requested input about potential options for how to offset reduced development charges.

6.5 Meeting with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC):

- a. Met with the Director General to discuss Durham's efforts to support refugees and asylum seekers, including strong local partnerships and a high retention rate.
- b. The Region's application to the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) aligns with federal priorities. Program decisions are expected in the coming months.
- c. IRCC emphasized the importance of coordination of services across municipalities.

6.6 Meeting with Public Safety Canada – Crime Prevention Branch:

- a. Met with the Director General to share Durham's use of the Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF) to achieve strong outcomes.
- b. The federal government plans to increase funding for effective programs and requested feedback on other grant initiatives.
- c. Feedback about federal crime prevention grants and was provided.
- d. Comments about the need for bail reform due to the impact on policing resources were shared.

7. Outcomes of Federal and Provincial Advocacy

- a. The increased advocacy with the provincial and federal governments has led to increased funding for the Region of Durham above the regular transfer payments. A few examples of funding that has been received in the last 12 months includes:
 - \$34.9M through the provincial Housing Enabling Water Systems Fund to support upgrades to the Oshawa Water Supply Plant, which will enable expansion of Whitby and Ajax Water Supply Plants in the future.
 - \$20M through the provincial Housing-Enabling Core Servicing Stream for the widening of Bowmanville Avenue that will unlock thousands of new housing units.

- \$6.4M through the federal Unsheltered Homeless and Encampment Initiative toward capital improvements for Phase 2 of 1635 Dundas St. East.
- \$10M in combined grant and loan financing through the Green Municipal Fund from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for deep energy retrofits at 315 Colborne St. West in Whitby.

8. Next Steps and Strategic Considerations

- 8.1 To follow up on Queen's Park Advocacy Day, invitations are being extended to various Ministers to visit Durham Region. These visits will provide an opportunity to tour key facilities and housing projects and to meet with the Regional Chair and Durham Mayors.
- 8.2 Additional meetings at Queen's Park will be considered once AMO conference delegations have been confirmed. The goal is to strengthen relationships with the Premier, Ministers, and MPPs while reinforcing key messages and building momentum on unresolved priorities with provincial decision-makers.
- 8.3 Planning is also underway for a Fall Federal Advocacy Day in Ottawa, with the goal of meeting with federal Ministers and MPs to strengthen relationships at the national level and advance Durham Region's advocacy priorities. A key objective will be to position the Region as a strategic partner to deliver the outcomes of the new Prime Minister and federal government.

9. Relationship to Strategic Plan

a. Connected and Vibrant Communities

- C2. Enable a full range of housing options, including housing that is affordable and close to transit.
- C3. Improve public transit system connectivity, reliability, and competitiveness.

b. Healthy People, Caring Communities

- H2. Collaborate with partners to respond to complex social issues that improve community safety and well-being, including mental health and addictions.
- H3. Integrate and co-ordinate service delivery for positive life outcomes, including investments in poverty prevention, housing solutions, and homelessness supports.

c. Resilient Local Economies

- R1. Attract and retain quality employers that strengthen key economic sectors, including energy and technology.

d. Strong Relationships

- S3. Collaborate across local area municipalities, with agencies, non-profits, and community partners to deliver co-ordinated and efficient services.
- S4. Advocate to the federal and provincial government and agencies to advance regional priorities.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 Advocacy remains a top priority for the Region, strongly supported by the Regional Chair, CAO and senior staff. Maintaining Durham's visibility with upper levels of government is essential to securing funding and policy support. Past successes, such as being approached for federal encampment funding, demonstrate that when our projects are known, they attract investment.
- 10.2 The Region's proactive and coordinated approach—through events like Advocacy Days, strategic meetings, and federal engagement—continues to position Durham as a partner of choice for both the provincial and federal governments.
- 10.3 The government relations team will continue to adapt to the evolving political landscape, ensuring that Durham's priorities are aligned with emerging opportunities and that advocacy efforts remain timely and impactful.
- 10.4 For additional information, contact: Alison Burgess, Director of Communications and Engagement.

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Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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