



WHITEWATER REGION ADVOCATES FOR KEY COMMUNITY NEEDS AT 2024 AMO CONFERENCE

Representatives from the Township of Whitewater Region participated in the 2024 Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference in Ottawa, held from August 18-21. This annual event serves as a crucial platform for municipal leaders across Ontario, offering opportunities for dialogue, learning, and advocacy. Township officials met with eight provincial ministers or their representative to address issues vital to the community's well-being and future growth, advocating for the strategic investments and support necessary to tackle local challenges.

Advocacy Points and Discussions:

- **Ministry of Finance:** The delegation presented the case for a new allocation within the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF) to support municipal water and wastewater operations. They emphasized the financial strain on residents in Cobden due to rising water and wastewater rates following the construction of a new treatment plant. Additionally, the Township discussed the need for a farm tax rate rebate to address the unfair tax burden on residential properties, exacerbated by the mandated tax ratio cap on farmland.
- **Ministry of Health:** Whitewater Region sought continued and enhanced support to expand home support services for the region's growing senior population. While the Township has made significant progress with its Age-Friendly Plan and the hybrid mobile Senior's Active Living Centre, officials emphasized the critical need for expanded access to services such as meals on wheels, transportation, and personal support, especially in geographically isolated areas.
- **Ministry of Infrastructure:** The delegation highlighted the ongoing affordability challenges related to water and wastewater rates in the region. We advocated for financial support through an annual operating grant, or a debenture buy-down to alleviate the financial burden on residents. Additionally, the Township discussed the potential impact of its application to the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, aimed at stabilizing rates and reducing costs for residents.

- **Ministry of Natural Resources:** Whitewater Region discussed the strategic importance of acquiring the former Timminco lands, a 240-acre greenfield property critical for future development, including potential housing, industrial, and commercial projects. The Township also highlighted the need for improvements to the Westmeath Boat Launch, a critical access point on the Ottawa River for emergency services. The delegation sought collaboration with federal and provincial governments to secure funding and expertise for dredging and infrastructure improvements.
- **Ministry of Rural Affairs:** The Township expressed gratitude for the 2023 Rural Economic Development (RED) funding, which enabled the development of a comprehensive Community Marketing Strategy in partnership with Greater Madawaska. Looking forward, Whitewater Region is embarking on a streetscaping initiative to revitalize the main streets of Cobden, Beachburg, and Westmeath, with the aim of boosting community pride and economic activity
- **Ministry of Sport:** The delegation discussed the recent acquisition of a 32-kilometer portion of the former CN Rail Line, which supports the Township's Active Transportation Plan by enhancing cycling and pedestrian opportunities. The Township seeks further support to complete the necessary trail improvements, transforming the former rail line into a stone dust trail cap that will promote tourism, regional connectivity, and economic development.
- **Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Gaming:** Whitewater Region highlighted its leadership in regional tourism and cultural activities, attracting over 70,000 visitors annually. The Township sought increased funding and marketing assistance to expand event offerings and improve infrastructure, as well as partnerships with provincial tourism boards and cultural organizations.
- **Treasury Board Secretariat - Emergency Management:** The Township emphasized the need for a Community Emergency Preparedness Grant (CEPG) to fund the purchase of a mobile generator and the installation of a water gauge. These investments are critical to enhancing the Township's emergency preparedness infrastructure, particularly in managing and mitigating the impact of flooding along the Ottawa River.

Mayor Neil Nicholson noted, "*The AMO conference offers Whitewater Region the opportunity to learn and share ideas with other municipalities on a number of topics. We are also able to directly advocate to a number of Ministers and key staff on challenges or opportunities specific to our communities. Overall, the AMO Conference is a valuable investment for Whitewater Region.*"

The Whitewater Region delegation's participation at the AMO Conference was a strategic effort to ensure that the Township's needs and priorities are recognized and addressed at the provincial level. The Township remains committed to fostering meaningful collaborations with provincial and municipal partners to address its challenges and create sustainable growth opportunities for the future.

Additional Information:

Ivan Burton, Dipl. M.M., RPP
 Chief Administrative Officer
 613-646-2282, Ext. 124
 iburton@whitewaterregion.ca

Neil Nicholson
 Mayor
 613-646-2282, Ext. 173 | 613-401-0097
 nnicholson@whitewaterregion.ca