

WESTERN ONTARIO WARDENS' CAUCUS PRIORITIES

As it has been since its inception, the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) is a strong partner and supporter of the upper levels of government. This relationship will be critical in the years ahead, as the ability for municipalities to balance budgets and continue to meet service levels remains under pressure – affecting everything from workforce development to infrastructure, and long-term care to social services.

The WOWC is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper and single-tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, representing more than 1.5 million residents. The organization aims to enhance the prosperity and overall well-being of rural and small urban communities across the region, by working collectively with upper levels of government. The WOWC recently adopted its strategic approach

for advocacy in 2023 and identified a series of key priorities for the coming year. This information is intended to continue building on the collaboration with the member municipalities of Southwestern Ontario. We wish to commend both the federal and provincial governments on the adoption of their 2023 budgets, which contain measures of support for Canadians and Ontarians.



“strong **partnership**
between our
governments...

will help **ensure**
collective **success**”

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: HOUSING

ISSUE

Housing affordability, particularly in rural areas, continues to remain a strong focus within Southwestern Ontario. Given the current housing and rental market, it is crucial to focus on increasing the supply of affordable housing, of all forms, so that all residents regardless of income level have a safe place to call home.

The WOWC commends both upper levels of government and the significant investments in housing that have been made.

The Ask

We are asking for a definition from the Province on the promise to “keep municipalities whole”

Background

It has been more than four months since Ontario promised to make municipalities “whole” regarding a loss of development charge revenue. Specifically, in Minister Clark’s letter to AMO, the province committed to “ensuring that municipalities are kept whole for any impact to their ability to fund housing enabling infrastructure because of Bill 23.”

We would like the Province to elaborate on this commitment and when we can expect a definition?

The Ask

Regarding the Building Homes Faster Act, WOWC would respectfully request numbers from the province, regarding how many new homes are expected in each County.

Background

Numbers and targets have been set for our urban counterparts and our rural Counties require the same direction:

- City of London 47,000
- City of Kitchener 35,000
- City of Guelph 18,000
- City of Cambridge 19,000
- City of Brantford 10,000

What are the numbers that need to be achieved for our rural communities?

Will there be any supports in mind for the necessary infrastructure upgrades that extend beyond our targeted growth?



The Ask

The Federal Housing Accelerator Fund distinguishes between “urban” and “small and rural” communities. All populations over 10,000 will fall into the urban stream, are our rural communities being measured against large urban centres across Ontario?

Background

The fund is an important sign of progress in the national effort to improve housing supply across the country – thank you.

The WOWC supports FCM’s call for the importance of an application process that is streamlined and accessible – to all levels of government – with eligibility considerations that do not create barriers to the transformative action Canada needs.



173,000
NEW HOUSING UNITS REQUIRED BY 2041



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: WORKFORCE TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH

ISSUE

There has been an ongoing focus for the WOWC over the past few years on workforce retention and expansion. This has been highlighted in the collaborative regional work through the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy

The Ask

We ask that the OINP will continue to be tailored to meet the needs of Western Ontario by including in-demand jobs for our region.

Background

Thank you to the Provincial Government for the additional \$25 million over three years to attract more skilled workers, including in-demand professionals in the skilled trades.

The WOWC region is home to 58% of the provincial total of temporary foreign workers. Adjusted for population size, there are 11 times as many temporary foreign workers in the WOWC region than the rest of Ontario.

Between January and March 2023, there were more than 35,000 job postings in Western Ontario – and 17,600 postings in March alone.

Types of jobs required:

- Construction trades moved into the top 10 spot in March
- Other occupations required include retail trade, transport truck drivers, home support workers, registered nurses, manufacturing, and agriculture

These sectors are all strategically important to the economy. If manufacturing jobs cannot be filled, this will reduce private sector economic activity in the region – as well as the taxes required by municipalities to sustainably fund public services.



If health care jobs cannot be filled here, these could be moved to other jurisdictions, forcing longer commutes for residents.

For our federal counterparts, we would like to reiterate our region's need for a faster and easier transition for Temporary Foreign Workers to become permanent residents. However, we will not be able to solve the problem only through immigration alone, so we also need investments in training and upskilling for people already living and housed here in the region.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTIONS, & HOMELESSNESS

ISSUE

Funding for our rural communities is a necessity. We are less equipped with fewer resources than our urban counterparts to tackle the growing mental health and addictions crisis.

The Ask

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) has reiterated its support and request to the provincial government for permanent funding of the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) program across Ontario.

Background

The MCRT funding provides critical funding support for our police forces to be paired with experienced mental health professionals in response to the substantial increase in mental health calls. Communities and residents in rural Western Ontario have felt the direct benefits from the pairing of specially trained police officers and mental-health professionals to respond to 911 emergency calls involving mental health or addictions.

This funding had been delivered from the Province of Ontario to various police forces and their partners through case-by-case, application-based grant funding. It has been recommended by multiple stakeholders, including the OPP, that these programs should be made permanent – through annualized funding.

The Ask

We are requesting that funding be allocated specifically for our rural communities as part of the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP).

Background

The WOWC would like to thank the provincial government for their investment in the HPP program and the increase in funding through the 2023 budget.

Our rural communities require an increased fair share in HPP funding given the specific growing strain for rural communities.

In some cases, the funding delivered by the CMSMs (located in urban centres) is simply not adequate to meet the growing needs in rural areas with respect to homelessness.

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