



NEWS RELEASE

Niagara-on-the-Lake Voices Local Needs at ROMA 2025 Conference

For Immediate Release

January 23, 2025

Council Members and Staff represented the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake at the 2025 Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference in Toronto from Sunday, January 19, to Tuesday, January 21, 2025.

Niagara-on-the-Lake attended four delegations to advocate for local priorities, engaging with Provincial leaders to discuss the unique challenges rural municipalities face and sharing ideas with other communities on addressing key issues like infrastructure, economic development, and sustainability.

The following Town representatives participated in the delegation meetings:

- Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa
- Deputy Lord Mayor/Councillor Erwin Wiens
- Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Bruce Zvaniga
- Director of Community & Development Services Kirsten McCauley
- Government Relations, Economic Development & Tourism Officer Ashleigh Myers

"I look forward to attending ROMA each year to advocate for our small but mighty community and to ensure Niagara-on-the-Lake's priorities are heard at the provincial level," stated Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa. "This year's discussions were productive and insightful, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities facing rural municipalities. Thank you to the Ministers and Parliamentary Assistants for engaging with us and to Council for their dedication to identifying and championing our community's priorities."

"This conference provides an opportunity to advocate for our Town and collaborate with other municipalities," said CAO Bruce Zvaniga. "I want to thank Staff and Council for their dedication, ensuring our efforts at ROMA advance our community's interests. Special thanks to Government Relations, Tourism, & Economic Development Officer Ashleigh Myers for her key role in preparing and supporting the Town's participation, effectively communicating our priorities to provincial leaders. Her leadership in advocacy and partnerships is vital to the Town's growth and sustainability."



The following is a high-level summary of topics discussed during the delegations.

Supporting Economic Growth and Tourism - Minister Stan Cho, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming

Town representatives sought Provincial funding of \$40 million to rebuild the Shaw Festival's historic Royal George Theatre, ensuring the preservation of a cultural landmark that strengthens Niagara-on-the-Lake's reputation as a world-class destination for arts and culture. Additionally, financial support was requested for an Airport Zoning Regulation (AZR) Review of the Niagara District Airport (YSN), a vital step toward modernization and unlocking economic growth and development potential in Niagara-on-the-Lake's strategic growth areas.

Irrigation Systems and On-Farm Diversification - Minister Rob Flack, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness

Council and Staff participated in a delegation to request investment for immediate upgrades and expansion of the user-funded Municipal Irrigation System. This initiative aims to meet the growing demands of farmers, growers, and the broader agricultural community while safeguarding long-term food security. Additionally, the Town called on the Province to review the 2016 *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* to better balance the evolving needs of agriculture and on-farm diversification while preserving Ontario's protected green spaces and environmental sustainability.

Master Servicing Plan, Feasibility Studies, and Modernization of Engineering Design Standards for Stormwater - Parliamentary Assistant Amarjot Sandhu, Ministry of Infrastructure

Town officials met with Provincial representatives to request funding for the Master Servicing Plan and Feasibility Studies, essential tools to help small municipalities plan for and accommodate growth and development effectively. These studies would also enable local projects to become "shovel-ready," ensuring municipalities are prepared to seize future funding opportunities. Recognizing that infrastructure implementation has followed the same approach for decades, the Town also urged the Province to review and modernize engineering design standards for stormwater management to address evolving needs and challenges associated with climate change and flooding.

Municipal Modernization and Big Picture Planning - Parliamentary Assistant Matthew Rae, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Council and Staff requested the Province revisit the 2019 Municipal Modernization Program to create new opportunities for municipalities to enhance operations and improve service delivery. Additionally, the Town discussed the Glendale Secondary Plan, support for an AZR Review of Niagara District Airport, and visionary big-picture



planning to support municipalities in the future development of vibrant and complete communities.

About ROMA

The Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) serves as the rural voice of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), advocating for policies and programs that support strong and effective rural governments and sustainable rural communities. ROMA's Executive Committee, comprising members who also serve on the AMO Board of Directors, meets approximately eight times a year to develop policy positions, represent rural municipal viewpoints in intergovernmental discussions, and inform the public on municipal issues.

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Media Contact:

Marah Minor, Communications Coordinator
905-468-3266 | communications@notl.com