



NEWS RELEASE

Niagara-on-the-Lake Strengthens Provincial Partnerships at ROMA 2026

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The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake advocated for key community priorities at the 2026 Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference in Toronto, held from January 18 to 20, 2026. ROMA offers municipal leaders a valuable opportunity to meet directly with provincial ministers to advance initiatives that align with Council's strategic priorities while also supporting provincial mandates and objectives, helping ensure local needs, funding opportunities, and long-term planning are connected to broader provincial goals.

Building on the Town's strong track record at ROMA, these delegations continue to deliver meaningful results for Niagara-on-the-Lake by strengthening provincial relationships and helping move priority projects forward.

Representing the Town at this year's conference were:

- Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens
- Councillor Maria Mavridis
- Councillor Andrew Niven
- CAO Nick Ruller
- Director of Planning, Building and Development Services Aimee Alderman
- Director of Organizational Performance, Strategy and Transformation Lauren Kruitbosch

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

Minister Cho, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming

The Town met with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming to confirm continued provincial interest and support for the proposed Glendale Eco-Park, a long-term initiative identified through the Glendale District Plan and the Town's approved Glendale Secondary Plan. Discussions focused on land availability, timing related to planned highway improvements, and next steps to advance the project. The Eco-Park is envisioned as a destination that integrates natural spaces, active transportation, tourism, and community well-being, with connections to regional trail networks, the



Bruce Trail, the Niagara Circle Route, and initiatives such as the Niagara GeoPark and Destination Niagara.

Minister Flack, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Housing affordability remains a priority for Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Town is exploring opportunities to partner with the Province to use surplus lands to support residential development. Building on previous Council-supported initiatives, discussions focused on confirming government interest and advancing shovel-ready housing projects that deliver a mix of housing types.

Council and Staff also advocated for the renewal and expansion of the Municipal Modernization Program, highlighting the growing financial pressures facing municipalities and the need for sustainable funding tools. The Town emphasized the importance of provincial support to help municipalities modernize operations, improve efficiency, and bring local projects to a shovel-ready stage, particularly given the capacity limitations faced by smaller municipalities.

Minister Fedeli, Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade

Council and Staff commended the Province's work to-date in eliminating interprovincial trade barriers that will enable the Town's wine, agri-food, and tourism businesses to expand into new domestic markets, enhance their competitiveness, and drive regional economic growth. Town representatives also discussed how Niagara-on-the-Lake is ready to work with the Province to deliver on Special Economic Zone (SEZ) initiatives that foster innovation, support Ontario's wine and agri-tourism sectors and balance economic growth with environmental protection and local authority.

Minister Thompson, Ministry of Rural Affairs

Town representatives requested targeted funding to support feasibility studies that help small municipalities plan for growth, housing, and infrastructure. Council and Staff also discussed the need for improved rural transit connectivity, including support for a potential Glendale transit hub and continued progress on the Heritage Trail. Improved transit options, including vehicular and active transportation, would enhance workforce mobility, connect rural areas to services and jobs, and support more sustainable travel options.

Director of Strategy and Stakeholder Relations Hundal – Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism



The Town met with representatives from the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism to request support in meeting the 2027 deadline for heritage designations, recognizing Niagara-on-the-Lake's historic importance and the role heritage plays in tourism. The discussion also covered updating the *Ontario Heritage Act* to simplify processes and strengthen municipal tools, while encouraging continued provincial leadership in engaging with insurance providers to help clarify that heritage designation should not, in itself, result in higher insurance premiums for property owners.

Recipient of the 2026 Rural Inspiration Award from the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs

Niagara-on-the-Lake was honoured to receive the 2026 Rural Inspiration Award, which recognizes rural Ontario communities demonstrating leadership, collaboration, and innovation. The award was jointly presented to Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Town of Minto in recognition of a creative equipment-sharing partnership that delivered significant cost savings and operational efficiencies for both municipalities. Through this collaboration, Minto leased a motor grader from Niagara-on-the-Lake, reducing capital costs, while Niagara-on-the-Lake leased a tractor from Minto for seasonal use, generating revenue for Minto and avoiding prolonged equipment downtime. This collaboration reflects a community-first approach, fiscal responsibility, and a shared commitment to long-term sustainability.

Quotes:

“ROMA gives municipalities the opportunity to have direct, meaningful conversations with provincial decision-makers. These meetings help ensure Niagara-on-the-Lake’s needs are clearly understood and reflected in the Province’s funding and policy decisions. On behalf of Council, thank you to the Ministers we met with for listening and to ROMA organizers for facilitating these important discussions and for their continued advocacy on behalf of rural municipalities across Ontario.” – **Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens**

“For small and rural municipalities, relationship-building is critical. ROMA allows us to advocate for practical solutions that support housing, infrastructure, and long-term community resilience. Thank you to Staff for their time and efforts to prepare for such an important conference and for their advocacy.” – **CAO Nick Ruller**

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