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NEWS RELEASE

EOWC elects new Chair and Vice-Chair, sets its 2015 Priorities

NEWS

The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC), at its annual inaugural meeting held in Kingston last week, elected Warden Eric Duncan of the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry as its Chair for 2015. Peterborough County Warden J. Murray Jones was elected as 2015 Vice-Chair.

Both members were elected to their new positions by acclamation. Chair Duncan is also Mayor of the Township of North Dundas, while Vice-Chair Jones is Mayor of the Township of Douro-Dummer.

The role of the Chair and Vice-Chair, elected on an annual basis, is to provide the main point of focus and contact for the Caucus and ensure the established key priorities – determined by all 13 members of the EOWC – move forward.

2015 Priorities

Three key priorities were established for the Caucus in the coming year:

- 1. Beginning the implementation of the key actions proposed in the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Strategy. This implementation is proposed to occur over the next three years: 2015, 2016 and 2017.*
- 2. Working in tandem with the Eastern Ontario Regional Network to prepare and submit an Eastern Ontario cellular infrastructure network improvement project.*
- 3. Continuing its research and advocacy efforts on matters related to the financial sustainability of municipal government in Eastern Ontario.*

For more details see the attached Backgrounder Report.

QUOTES

“I am honoured to Chair the Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus and to have the opportunity to work very hard to support all property taxpayers in the 103 member municipalities across the EOWC region, stated EOWC Chair and Warden Eric Duncan. “The EOWC takes pride in doing its homework and coming up with new ideas that contribute to positive change in our municipalities.”

“One of our major concerns is the ever escalating cost of policing, whether with the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) or municipal. We will work with groups such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), looking at all options to reduce the burden to local taxpayers of providing emergency service,” added Duncan.

“The economic development of our region has consistently been recognized as a priority, and for that reason I welcome the implementation of our long-awaited regional economic strategy for Eastern Ontario. I’m eager to see the early results of this multi-partner collaboration, which will represent a significant step forward for the region,” added EOWC Vice-Chair J. Murray Jones.

“Municipalities across the region continue to face significant financial shortfalls,” concluded Warden Duncan. “We have taken the first steps by setting our priorities and we will stay focused on them. With a federal election and the first full year of the provincial majority government both on the horizon, 2015 will be another busy year.”

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2015 Priorities

Backgrounder

Each January, the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus meets to set its priorities for the coming year. Last week, in addition to electing its Chair and Vice-Chair, the EOWC established its key objectives which will guide its work through the course of 2015.

Priority #1

The EOWC's first priority in 2015, working with our partners, will be to implement the key actions proposed in the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Strategy. This implementation is proposed to occur over the next three years: 2015, 2016 and 2017.

This Strategy, officially released at the AMO 2014 Conference, was the result of a year-long collaboration between the EOWC, the Eastern Ontario Mayors' Committee (EOMC), the business and academic communities, and supported financially by the provincial and federal governments. A number of key actions and recommendations were proposed, which are now to be funded and implemented over the next three years.

Priority #2

The EOWC's second priority in 2015 will be to work with the Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN) to prepare and submit an Eastern Ontario cellular infrastructure network improvement project.

Mobile phone and broadband services are increasingly essential to citizens, businesses, first responders and municipal services. The EOWC has been concerned for some time now about the coverage and capacity of cellular networks across Eastern Ontario. Earlier this year, the EOWC and EORN worked with an industry leader in radio frequency (RF) engineering to undertake a detailed analysis of gaps in existing cellular coverage.

That firm, Wireless Works, along with our engineering team, is also undertaking an assessment of the current capacities in cell networks combined with a unique study of which future capacities will be needed to ensure that this essential service is robust enough to support the demand from all sectors. This study will tell us with certainty what next steps we need to take in order to ensure that networks across the rural parts of our region have the same kind of coverage and capacity as other communities here and across the country. This is essential for the growth and prosperity of Eastern Ontario.

Priority #3

The EOWC's third and ongoing priority will be to continue its research and advocacy efforts on the issue of the financial sustainability of municipalities.

The EOWC has undertaken extensive studies to assess issues affecting the continued financial sustainability of local governments across Eastern Ontario. In 2013 and 2014, the EOWC completed and distributed a total of five White Papers to further assist its advocacy efforts on the financial sustainability of municipal government. Among other matters, these studies demonstrated that municipalities are facing a \$3.4-billion shortfall, and that neither using existing reserves nor issuing more debt would solve the problem.

A long-term provincial infrastructure program is needed and the EOWC will continue its advocacy for permanent infrastructure funding. Furthermore, “sustainability” includes policing costs, joint and several liability, as well as the recommendations outlined in the five White Papers.

The five White Papers covered the following topics:

- Municipal Infrastructure
- Municipal Affordability
- Ratepayer Affordability
- Environmental Services
- Social Housing