



Council Briefing Note

For Information: 18 February 2025

ROMA 2025 Conference: January 19-21, 2025 - Toronto

Purpose: *To report a few highlights from the recent conference of the Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA) held at the Sheraton Toronto Hotel in January.*

Motion to consider:

- 1. That the Council of the Municipality of Whitestone receive this report for information.**

Prepared by: Mayor George Comrie

Opening Keynote Address by Chantal Hebert

In her prescient keynote address on Sunday afternoon, CBC Political Affairs Journalist Chantal Hébert discussed the political climate, both federal and provincial, in the wake of the inauguration of U.S. President Trump. She accurately predicted the snap provincial election now underway, and expressed the view that the central issue in it – and in the federal election that will follow shortly – will be the tariff threats to our economy, not the carbon taxes.

Rural Affairs Announcements

The Hon. Lisa Thompson, Minister of Rural Affairs, announced changes to protect agricultural land in Ontario. New provincial policy statements that will affect land use planning were announced, and described in greater detail in a subsequent break-out session. These will need to be incorporated in our new Official Plan.

Cyber Security

I attended a break-out session entitled “*Cyber Security: We’ve Had a Breach, What Now?*” presented by Randy Purse from the Rogers Catalyst Centre at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson) and former Stratford Mayor Dan Mathieson. Their presentation focused on cybersecurity incident response planning, and featured a useful checklist from a governance perspective.

In an unrelated break-out session on emergency services, it was suggested that cyber security incidents should be covered under the same protocols used for physical emergencies such as fires, floods, tornados, etc. Interestingly, former Mayor Mathieson was asked if he had declared an emergency when he learned of Stratford’s ransom attack. His answer: “No, but in retrospect I should have.”

Addresses by Provincial Politicians

Premier Doug Ford addressed the assembly on Monday morning, and received a standing ovation for his commitment to fight to protect Ontario from the threats of U.S. tariffs.

Ministers Rob Flack (Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness) and Kinga Surma (Infrastructure) also spoke.

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Paul Calandra confirmed that his Ministry is preparing legislation to standardize municipal codes of conduct and to increase penalties available for egregious and persistent breaches, including removal from office and ineligibility to hold office for up to six years.

Over 20 Conservative Cabinet Ministers were present for the *Ministers' Forum* Session (AKA "The Bear Pit") on Monday afternoon to answer questions from the audience.

The other provincial party leaders also addressed plenary sessions: Bonnie Crombie (Liberal), Marit Stiles (NDP), and Mike Shreiner (Green Party).

Trade Show

The conference featured a large trade show with over 80 exhibitors.