



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