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TO: Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee

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SUBJECT: **ROMA 2024 Conference Delegate Report (Clarke Kelly)**

OBJET : **Le rapport du délégué du congrès annuel de ROMA 2024 (Clarke Kelly)**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to report to Committee following attendance at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) annual conference.

Pursuant to the Council Expense Policy, Members of Council who undertake City-funded travel to the ROMA annual conference must submit a written report to the Finance and Corporate Services Committee detailing their experiences, what they learned at the conference and how the City's position or interests were advanced.

BACKGROUND

The City of Ottawa is the fourth largest city in Canada and the second largest city in Ontario. As a leading municipality, Ottawa is a member of several municipal organizations responsible for advancing important priorities and engaging with upper levels of government. Our participation allows the City to influence policy development at the provincial and national level, while networking and learning from our peers. To this end, Members of Council are invited to attend various conferences, conventions, and meetings both within and outside the municipality.

The Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) – the rural voice of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario – hosted the 2024 Annual General Meeting and Conference from January 21 to January 23, 2024, in Toronto, Ontario. In addition to Councillor Clarke Kelly, the city's representative to ROMA, Councillor Riley Brockington, Councillor Catherine Kitts, and Councillor George Darouze attended this event.

DISCUSSION

With this being my second year as Councillor and City of Ottawa ROMA delegate, I arrived at the conference with goals to accomplish that went beyond connecting and learning. This year I had meetings set up with stakeholders and 4 delegations with provincial cabinet ministers and their staff.

Whenever I was not in a delegation or a meeting I could be found in plenary and concurrent sessions, or on the trade show floor talking with the many vendors, service providers, and organizations that play a role in making rural life better.

As was my experience last year, City of Ottawa delegates often get funny looks as we are not perceived as a rural municipality to most other delegates, but many are surprised to learn just how massive the City of Ottawa is and that a vast majority of that land mass is rural.

Generally, my experience is that Rural Ottawa has so much in common with the smaller rural municipalities throughout the province and that I learn a lot and make many good connections while at ROMA. The Theme of this year's ROMA Conference was "Closer to Home" meant to highlights the challenges of attracting services and businesses.

Day 1

The conference started off with Zone Meetings. I joined Christa Lowery, Mayor of Mississippi Mills and Zone 8 representative, along with all the other Zone 8 delegates

for an update which was largely focused on access to health, drainage issues, and housing which was focused on new legislation from the province and changes to zoning.

The number of residents of Rural Ontario without access to a family physician or a family health team is increasing four times as fast as in urban areas. It was also troubling to learn that hospitals in Rural Ontario were disproportionately affected by the temporary Emergency Department closures in 2022 and 2023. Rural residents without primary care are more vulnerable to other health risks. When the nearest Emergency Department is closed, they have nowhere close to home to get help. This happens to many rural residents in the City of Ottawa whose first or even second option for emergency care would be at hospitals outside of Ottawa such as Arnprior, Carleton Place, and Almonte which have been affected by closures over the last several years.

I heard in this update that rural municipalities fund a significant share of Ontario's health system and often spearhead local efforts to find innovative ways to close systemic gaps. Rural communities must be part of its governing structures.

It made me think of the great work being done by the Carp Family Medical Team who have forged a relationship with local paramedics and have increased the amount of care they can provide as a result.

ROMA has identified more than a dozen ways to improve access to health services by capitalizing on the considerable skills and expertise of healthcare professionals in new ways.

ROMA has presented 8 themes and 22 recommendations to the province. The themes are as follows:

- Ensure that rural municipalities have a seat at their Ontario Health Teams' table
- Fix Primary Care
- Reconfigure the Deployment of Health Human Resources
- Shift Demand from Emergency Departments to More Appropriate Forms of Care
- Complete the Full Range of Community Care
- Implement Inter-professional Team Approaches
- Support Community-Focused Innovation in Rural Ontario, and
- Preserve Public Health Emergency Response and Prevention Programs.

I was pleased to hear about the advocacy being done by our ROMA reps at the board level on this issue.

Housing was also on the agenda given the importance. According to Mayor Lowrey's update good quality, reasonably priced rental accommodation has long been in short supply in rural communities and remains so today. Economies of scale are harder to achieve for multi-unit projects and it is difficult to encourage developers to consider projects in Rural Ontario. Gaps in the spectrum of housing options mean that rural residents who might otherwise free up existing housing stock by downsizing or moving from owner-occupied to rental homes can't afford to do so or may not be able to find a new place to live nearby. This is particularly the case with many seniors, who find that they must continue to live in a home that is much too large for their needs.

The younger generations are also finding it difficult to afford homes in the rural communities in which they grew up and have to leave. Personally, I know many people who have had to leave Ward 5 to find a place to live that is even remotely affordable.

It was mentioned that the current legislative, regulatory, and policy regime for housing in Ontario contains many barriers that hamstring efforts by municipal governments and others in Rural Ontario to implement well-designed solutions.

We briefly explored the ROMA housing report's highlights. Over a five-month period, ROMA's Attainable Housing Task Force identified the issues and solutions that will enable municipalities in Rural Ontario to respond effectively to the dramatic shifts in provincial, regional, and local housing markets. Some of the key concerns were learned from more than 255 responses by rural municipalities to a survey ROMA distributed in March 2022. ROMA recognizes that action on the proposed solutions will not, by itself, solve the housing challenges in Rural Ontario; other stakeholders – beyond municipalities – must be engaged. But this report is a good start.

The report highlights are as follows:

- Amending provincial legislation and/or regulations to bring clarity to planning processes for provincial and municipal governments, as well as housing project proponents and citizens.
- Delegating authority and flexibility for municipal governments to encourage, review and approve housing solutions that "fit" their communities while remaining consistent with good planning principles and key planning documents (such as their Official Plans).
- Accelerating planning processes based on prioritization of specific types of municipally approved housing projects.

- Implementing targeted incentives to enable proponents to reduce long-term risk and model financially viable projects at scales and configurations that work in Rural Ontario.
- Undertaking tasks that can get municipally approved housing projects “out of the gate” faster, thereby reducing prospects for costly delays.

At the Zone Meetup I was joined by Councillor George Darouze, Councillor Catherine Kitts, and Councillor Riley Brockington.

Following the Zone Meet up I attended the opening plenary session.

This began with a keynote address from Shane Feldman. His message essentially is about the power of community and talks about how to cultivate community-centred workplaces that enable individuals and teams to perform at their highest levels. That is done by building better relationships, and increased engagement. He also focused a lot on being genuine and authentic which as an elected representative is very important. Overall, the keynote speech contained some inspiring stories and ideas on how to increase community engagement.

The conference then heard some highlights from the ROMA Strategic Plan 2024-2027.

The plan is focused on advocating for supporting municipal capacity building, which means making different resources available to rural governments, advocating for change that contributes to the wellbeing of rural communities by providing input to the work of AMO to inform, advance, and amplify policy development and advocacy.

Following this, we heard from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and listened to a panel discussion on the many changes and opportunities in our agrifood sector and the important role farms of various sizes play in the Ontario economy.

I was not feeling well and wanted to rest up for the next day, so I decided not to attend the opening reception.

Day 2

I listened to opening Keynote by Chair Robin Jones as she explained the challenges that rural communities in Ontario currently face, from infrastructure deficits, housing pressures, keeping seniors in rural communities, closed emergency rooms and limited access to primary care among many other things. The theme of the conference was fitting, Closer to Home. Rural communities need access to services in their

communities, but the tax base does not support this usually. She set the stage for the conversations to come.

Following the opening keynote, the AGM was held and then we heard from Premier Ford, who focused on the importance of the Ontario Economy and the role rural communities play in that. He spoke about their great relations with the federal government and the partnerships they are making when it comes to housing and infrastructure for our growing communities. As a former City Councillor, Premier Ford also touched on his experience at that level and how important the municipality is to peoples' lives.

Minster Surma then took the stage to discuss the new Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund to support municipal water projects that will help unlock housing opportunities and further protect communities. Through this program, the government is providing \$200 million over three years to help municipalities repair, rehabilitate and expand critical drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure.

Following the morning plenary, I toured the trade show floor and connected with several of the representatives including the Snowmobile Association of Ontario where we discussed the increased challenges to maintaining the trail network, the effects of climate change, changes in private property owners, as well as expanding relationships with ATV clubs who are also seeking use of trails and old railways lines for recreational purposes.

I visited the Food Cycler representatives to discuss this idea, pilot projects that are happening in other municipalities who don't have organics programs like City of Ottawa, as well as the concept itself on a large scale. This could be a great tool for managing organics in multi unit developments in the City of Ottawa.

I visited the Good Roads booth as road conditions and maintenance are a topic of great concern in rural areas. We discussed what membership in Good Roads means; I inquired about research and information that they have and how to access this information and upcoming events and conferences that they plan to hold in 2024. I am considering attending their workshop on Navigating Low Volume Roads located in Barrie in August.

Along with Councillor Darouze, I took the time for a fairly lengthy visit to the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) booth to talk about our recent experience with their latest round of procurement for Battery Energy Storage projects. We advocated for a much more clear and transparent procurement process and asked

that they have experts help with the public consultation aspect of these projects which is sorely lacking. The process and the many players involved is very confusing for people and the public will never accept the outcome of a process that is not clear and where applicants do the bare minimum to engage the local community. We talked about standards and expectations around who pays for fire suppression and the resources it takes when one of these systems catches fire. Location of these systems was also a topic of conversation, with our argument essentially being that we need to find a way for them to be put in areas that are already industrial. We also raised concerns about property values, well water contamination, and light and noise pollution from these systems.

I also had two delegations lined up for Monday; the first being with the Minister of Energy, where Councillor Darouze and I talked about the IESO and the various procurements that they have in plans for energy storage. Given that many of these projects will be out in rural areas, we wanted to explain our experience as rural councillors so far and the challenges we had seen. We offered some potential solutions along the same lines as those we had during our visit to the IESO booth.

The second delegation was with the Minister of Tourism Culture and Sport. I advocated for funding for a new electronic scoreboard for the Fitzroy Community Centre. Fastball is huge in West Carleton-March, and we have hosted a number of national tournaments over the last several years. The Fitzroy Community Association has some very dedicated volunteers who have done some amazing work on their diamonds and have put together some very competitive teams over the years. We did not receive an offer for funding, but I did receive a call from the Minister's team a few weeks later explaining that they were going to open a new funding stream for this type of request based on the delegations they had received at ROMA like mine asking for this type of funding.

On day 2, I had the chance attend the concurrent session on Municipal Lessons Learned with Energy Projects. I was particularly interested in this as it has been a topic in rural Ottawa for several years now. This was presented by Michael Di Lullo, CAO, Municipality of Middlesex Centre and Tonja Leach, Executive Director, QUEST Canada. This included a breakdown of roles and responsibilities in Ontario's grid system which is actually part of a very large North American grid. The province's rapidly growing population, electrifying industry, and aging nuclear reactors will shift the province's electricity grid from decades of comfortable surplus to critical shortages in just a few years. By 2026, the province's grid could strain to meet demand during peak hours; by 2030 soaring demand could outpace generation capacity.

According to the IESO's Pathways to Decarbonization (P2D) report high-growth scenario, in less than 30 years Ontario could need more than double its electricity generating capacity, from 42,000 megawatts (MW) today to 88,000 MW in 2050.

The presentation outlined the key steps that can be taken to achieve this:

- **Energy Efficiency Focus:** To transition towards cleaner energy, prioritize reducing energy demand through enhanced efficiency across all sectors.
- **Utilizing Current Infrastructure:** Leverage existing assets like nuclear and natural gas, add renewable natural gas and hydrogen blends, and promote non-competitive transit systems alongside personal vehicles. Integrate renewables and small modular reactors.
- **Optimized Land Use:** Promote sustainable land management aligned with cleaner energy goals, revise land use practices to accommodate renewable energy installations, and optimize energy production from available spaces.
- **Waste-to-Energy Opportunities:** Harness waste as an energy source: thermal waste from sewers and local industries, renewable natural gas from landfills, and energy derived from forestry and agriculture waste. This approach minimizes the need for extensive electricity system expansion.
- **New Infrastructure and Economic Opportunities:** Accommodate new infrastructure for generation, transmission, and distribution, fostering business models that create local economic growth opportunities.

I also attended the Enbridge learning lunch with my colleagues George Darouze and Catherine Kitts to hear about the important role that natural gas will continue to play as we diversify our energy sources to reduce carbon emissions and strengthen our grid.

I ended the day by briefly attending the Provincial Government Reception.

Day 3

I started the day with a meeting with Mike Nolan, Chief Paramedic for Renfrew County. Chief Nolan has served as a Paramedic, Flight Paramedic, Professor, Deputy Chief of the Ottawa Paramedic Service, President of the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada, Director of Emergency Management for the City of Ottawa and is currently the Director and Chief of the Paramedic Service for the County of Renfrew.

He is literally winning awards for the great work that has been done in Renfrew County with their paramedics and I wanted to meet with him to discuss what is working for him, and whether the City of Ottawa could potentially implement some of the same strategies

that he has. He mentioned several areas where he thinks there could be a different approach that worked in Renfrew County. Given his past experience with the City of Ottawa, it was great to hear his take. Given the many level zeros we have had and continue to have, and the effect it has on rural area response times, we agreed that additional follow up conversations would be appropriate.

Following my meeting with Mr. Nolan I did a delegation to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

The point of this delegation was to solicit funds for West Carleton Disaster Relief, a local and volunteer-based organization in West Carleton to assist people and communities in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. Because of the large geographic area that West Carleton-March covers, they require storage space and funds to fill that space with items that are often used in a disaster – such as bottled water, hip waders, rubber boots, shovels, pumps, hoses, generators, and many more items that will help people get through a flood, tornado, or a long-term power outage.

Councillor Catherine Kitts and I then did a joint delegation to the Minister of Health, with both the Town of Arnprior as well as McNab Braeside. We asked questions about and advocated for a change in the funding formula for doctors in the province. Currently, doctors are paid based on their rostered patients and not billable hours. This has resulted in a climate where clinics penalize patients for going to walk-in clinics or seeing other doctors, sometimes even threatening to de-roster them as patients. This results in people going to emergency rooms when they really just need to see a primary care physician and adds to the stress on our smaller rural based hospitals that often serve the rural residents of Ottawa in towns such as Arnprior, Carleton Place, Almonte etc.

While the rural delegates from the City of Ottawa try their best to and do make it worth our while to be there, I would say that the City does not take ROMA nearly as seriously as it takes other municipal conferences.

I reached out to City staff in the planning department for guidance on delegations and to ensure I was properly prepared to further our goals as the biggest rural municipality in Ontario. The lack of response was extremely discouraging; not only did staff not help me prepare as the City's official delegate, they failed to even acknowledge my correspondence seeking guidance. If our goals for the rural areas of our City are to be met, it will not come solely as a result of efforts from rural Councillors, but with support from staff who are committed to supporting the rural areas of the City of Ottawa. In 2025

I fully expect staff to prepare ROMA delegates in the same way they would AMO, FCM, or any other municipal conference.

CONCLUSION

It is through the commitment of Members of Council, to attend conferences like the ROMA 2024 Conference, that the City of Ottawa's interests are advanced, but we require City of Ottawa staff to take it more seriously and be committed to supporting ROMA delegates in a comprehensive manner moving forward.

Clarke Kelly

Councillor, Ward 5 West Carleton-March