

INTERACTION

Roger Anderson

**Chair of the Region of Durham and
President of the Association of
Municipalities of Ontario**



Roger Anderson has been a local municipal politician for more than 20 years. Last year, he was elected president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

Known for his blunt and outspoken views, Mr Anderson spoke with us from his office in Whitby.

You started in real estate and then become a police officer. How did you end up in politics?

It was all to do with ice. I was coaching a boys hockey team and when you have to start at 4:30 in the morning, well that's just not a good way to do business.

We needed more rinks in Ajax and even though my boys were just two years old at the time I felt this was an important issue so I ran.

You were still a police officer as well?

I was a regular first class constable with the region but because locally we didn't field many police issues, I was able to stay on the force.

The police chief, Jon Jenkins, was very supportive and very co-operative in giving me the time off to attend meetings.

I used to get to city hall just in time to take off my police jacket and put on a suit jacket. I still had my service revolver and truncheon with me - perhaps, that's why I didn't get too many arguments from the other members of council.

And did you get your new ice rink?

I did but it took about eight years. The wheels of government grind slowly but at least it was an incentive to keep running for office.

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INSIGHT

Roger Anderson

Chair - Region of Durham
President - Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Home: Ajax
Family: twin sons 22 years old, Ryan and Warren
Born: Scarborough (but has lived in Ajax since he was 14)
Age: 52

Business Experience:

- Real Estate agent (1973 - 1978)
- Durham Regional Police (1978 - 88)
- Real Estate (1990 - present)

Political Experience:

- Councillor, Ajax (1985 - 1988)
- Hydro Commissioner (1988 - 1991)
- Regional Councillor and Deputy Mayor Ajax (1991 - 1997)
- Chair, Region of Durham (1997 - present)

Associations and Committees:

- President of Association of Municipalities of Ontario (2004 - present)
- Director of GO Transit
- Member of the Board - Junior Achievement of Durham
- Member - Durham Region Police Services Board

Hobbies and Interests:

Playing golf and hockey and enjoying a good book

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You left politics for three years before rejoining the Regional council. How did you get back into politics?

One of the councillors left office and I was appointed to take his place for the next year and a half. So I decided to keep going.

Did you find much of a difference between regional and local government?

Not really. It was just bigger issues and more time but we were really still dealing with what I consider are the local concerns that really affect people.

And in 1997 you became Chair of the Region.

It's a bit like becoming Prime Minister in the sense that you don't run publicly for the position - the council elects you.

The contest was between Wayne Arthurs, now our local MPP, and me. The first ballot we tied. The second ballot I won and I was pretty happy I can tell you.

Everyone wants to put his or her own mark on the office. What do you think you did differently from your predecessors?

I wanted to make sure that the Region had someone who could deliver the message.

One of the problems regional governments face is a lack of identification. People tend to pay more attention to their local councils. It's unfortunate because in many ways the regional government is actually more important. But as services change - ambulance now, transit soon - people are starting to pay more attention.

One of the first things we did was to televise council meetings. People want to see us accomplish something not just hash over old issues.

The Region needs a voice and I think that's a role I have helped fill.

How has regional government changed in the last decade?

The services that we provide have really expanded dramatically, especially with all the downloading. Social services are much more important as are environmental issues.

We are delivering more and what we deliver is costing a lot more too.

Which brings us to the ever-popular issue of funding.

It has taken a long time but taxpayers are starting to realize just how much has been downloaded on local government.

Some of these services don't belong to a property tax and it's about time they go back to where they rightfully belong.

On the other hand, Durham like the other regions in and around the GTA has benefited from a well-sustained economic boom over the past few years.

It hasn't hurt but it's a fine line. Development does bring in new revenue but it also brings in new costs. We really believe the provincial government has neglected Durham

compared say to Peel, which has benefitted tremendously from a lot of infrastructure development. We need a significant investment in our highways, for example. Highway 407 and 400 have to be extended to and through Durham and Highway 401 and Highway 7 need to be widened in order to get more development.

We are also concerned about the impact of the new greenbelt and the 'Places to Grow' legislation. When you take away property rights and local and regional planning you create problems. Durham should not be the bedroom for other communities. We need more than one new job for every three new residents. If the provincial government doesn't get the industrial and commercial development to match the residential expansion the only thing that is going to go up are our property taxes.

That being said, all of the regional governments are in a similar position. The funding gap has to be closed. If we ever go into a depressed market, social services will ruin the property tax payer.

You mentioned Peel but it is under fire from its own constituents. Mississauga would really like to see the end of regional government as we know it. Do you face the same issue in Durham?

The basic concept of regional government is sound: big enough to pull costs together, small enough to stay in touch with the local community and what the residents need.

Peel helped Mississauga get the infrastructure it needs to become a thriving city. It's not the time to pull away now.

Parochialism is probably the most destructive force a region can face. One of the advantages we have in Durham is that our local councils understand the role of regional government and appreciate how we can work together to our mutual advantage.

You don't get any of that "if it's not going to benefit my municipality, I'm not going to support it" attitude. Our councillors really try to look at the big picture and make their decisions accordingly.

You became president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in 2004, which gives you a much broader picture of municipal government across Ontario. What, in your opinion, are the biggest issues that AMO faces?

We're moving forward with a very strong agenda.

The Province of Ontario signed a memorandum of understanding with AMO that really defines how the provincial government will consult with the municipalities through AMO on matters of mutual interest. And with the passage of Bill 92, that basic principle is now law.

It means that municipalities are no longer the ward of the province. We are full-fledged partners.

What else are you looking for in the next year and a half as AMO president?

I think the next thing is to wean the province off the property tax benefits. We have to get them to take back some of the health and social service costs. I would like to see the province pay at least 50 percent of ambulance costs for example.

At least the province has indicated that it is prepared to provide a portion of the gas tax but that is earmarked for transit, which really only impacts a few of AMO's members.

What is AMO's position?

To be fair, the provincial government's commitment to gas tax revenue sharing was clearly set out in their election platform as transit funding but while its intentions are laudable, the practice is not equitable.

When Ontario taxpayers pay provincial gas taxes, they need to know they are getting something in return – no matter where they live in this province.

Our position is that the provincial government needs to allocate an additional 2 cents per litre of provincial gas tax revenue to municipalities for other transportation-related costs like roads and bridges.

And I was pleased to see that OGRA has endorsed AMO's position as well on the Federal Tax Gas allocation and we thank them for that.

Anything else?

It would also be nice to see the provincial government follow the federal government's lead and remove the sales tax on products and services that municipalities purchase.

One level of government taxing another level of government just doesn't make sense.

But it's not all on the back of the provincial government. There's a third partner, the federal government that has also indicated that it is prepared to work with municipalities. Unfortunately right now (early May), it's a bit preoccupied.

What happens if there's an election?

If the federal budget isn't signed, Ontario will lose about \$1.8 billion in revenue and that creates a bit of a problem for us.

I don't mind if they have an election. Just pass the budget first.

Still, it seems that you are a bit more hopeful now that the three levels of government are talking.

Absolutely.

I met with Minister Godfrey (Federal Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities) last month and he was clearly prepared to listen to both sides of the argument and then make a decision.

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Provincially we have a Premier who is prepared to talk to us and a Minister of Municipal Affairs (John Gerretsen), who, as an ex-mayor himself, has shown a willingness to listen and an appreciation of municipal concerns.

They have shown that they are open for discussion. Whether the time frames are right is another question but they are prepared to listen and that's a step in the right direction.

And how do you see the relationship between AMO and OGRA and other associations, all of whom have similar interests and similar constituents?

I think we have a great relationship.

One of the first things I did as President of AMO was to meet with some of the other associations so that we could compare notes and make sure we are all talking from the same page.

I think that there is actually more that we can do together. AMO only has 18 full-time staff members. Just like OGRA, we rely on volunteers devoting hours and hours of time to help advance our agenda. I think pooling our resources and making more joint submissions would be a huge accomplishment.

You have been a politician for 20 years now. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

With a job like mine? I wake up every day feeling good.

I am proud of the new regional headquarters we are building, which means that people who have been working together for years will finally all be in the same place.

I am proud of our ambulance service and looking forward to taking over responsibility for regional transit next year.

Being President of AMO is something anyone would be proud of.

As a former police officer, I enjoy sitting on the police services board. I enjoy being a member of the GO Transit board. I even enjoy Council meetings.

And I am also proud to say that I host the best golf tournament in the province. Each year we raise about \$330,000 for Durham College and the

University of Ontario Institute of Technology in Durham and for Junior Achievement to help support the almost 15,000 students in our region learning to value free enterprise and develop their leadership skills.

You couldn't ask for a better job. **M**