

# PRESENTATION

Jim Watson  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

To

2009 OGRA/ROMA Combined Conference

Canadian Room  
Royal York Hotel

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Check Against Delivery

Good morning.

Thank you for that kind introduction, Bill Vrebosch.

Je remercie les autres membres du comité exécutif de la ROMA, David Leckie, président de l'OGRA, et le conseil d'administration de m'avoir invité aujourd'hui.

I thoroughly enjoyed last year's conference – meeting and speaking with delegations, visiting booths, and of course ... my 'inaugural' dance with my Parliamentary Assistant Carol Mitchell at last year's Ontario reception.

I promise not to scare you this year with my dancing at the reception today at 5pm, featuring home grown Ontario food and the folk music of the Good Lovelies.

As you know, "What's coming down the road" is the conference theme for this year.

I'm not sure who exactly decided on that theme, but I bet they didn't predict just what we'd be encountering on the road right now, and the uncertainty that exists down it.

There's no denying we're in for difficult times — the news media are full of doom-and-gloom.

None of you need me to tell you that the global downturn is reaching right into your communities.

These are challenging times and trying times on people's daily lives, affecting our families and our communities.

We surely all have a story to tell.

I remember my childhood.

We moved frequently.

From Lachute, Quebec, to Montreal, to Thornhill, to Sarnia and eventually to Ottawa. I attended 5 different schools during those 6 years.

My family made these sacrifices because that was part of the job.

Looking back, I know we were lucky; the job was there, my dad just had to keep following it.

Today that might not have been the case.

I tell you this because I know that Ontarians are making sacrifices.

I know that you as municipal leaders are thinking of creative ways for your communities to deal with changing times.

There are some pretty interesting ideas out there, which we all can learn from.

I read about one interesting idea recently about the State of Florida.

They are changing the design on the official state license plate to save \$50,000 each year.

The light brown stem on the oranges that now grace the plates, will soon become green, like the leaves on either side of the orange.

This will reduce the number of colours from four to three and will shrink production costs.

I know that right here at home you are also trying to find these efficiencies.

In Cambridge – there is a new Emergency Medical Services Headquarters and Fleet Centre.

They're using locally manufactured solar panels – Spherical Solar Power. It's reducing CO<sup>2</sup> emissions by 90 tonnes/year and 57 per cent energy savings.

It's expected to save the municipality tens of thousands of dollars a year.

In Hamilton, Mayor Eisenberger has championed the Woodward Avenue Water and Wastewater Facility

It's the largest biogas cogeneration project in Canada. It's expected that the project will generate 16.4 million kilowatt hours of renewable electricity

Our government has made great strides with the Newborn Registration Service. It allows parents to apply online for a SIN card at the same time they register a child's birth.

I have just rhymed off three examples from the hundreds that exist, but if we learn anything from the report which Roger Martin and Richard Florida recently produced for our government, it's that creative solutions are going to help us steer our way forward, and restructure our domestic economy to attract more investment and job creation.

Sometimes, however, even creative solutions can't solve all the problems.

And this is why the province is trying to assist you to the extent that our coffers allow.

Well before the current economic climate developed, we were working to place Ontario's economy — and you — on a stronger foundation.

This strong foundation that will keep Ontario as a competitor and leader in our nation and in the global market place.

Since 2003, our government has increased its investment in municipalities, and in many other sectors, such as health care and education.

Ever since our government came to office, we have been fostering a partnership approach that has brought in a new era of respect and understanding between the province and the municipal sector.

We substantially increased our support for municipalities.

And last October, we entered into a long-term commitment that is transforming how our government does business with its partners.

I'm speaking, of course, of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review.

The report of that Review was appropriately called: Facing the Future Together.

It may have seemed like it took a long time to reach a conclusion — it seemed that way to us sometimes — but we reached an historic agreement that places the municipal sector on a much firmer footing for the future.

You should be very proud of the municipal representation at these historic discussions. Some of your representatives are at this conference:

Doug Reycraft, past AMO president and the leader of the AMO Review team.

Peter Hume, the current AMO President.

Richard Adams, the Mayor of Parry Sound.

Michael Power, Mayor of Greenstone.

And Bob Sweet, the Mayor of Petawawa.

All of the municipal leaders deserve to be congratulated for their tireless effort and their strong advocacy on your behalf.

The Review sets out a long-term vision.

It gives municipalities the means to budget for the future in a more predictable way.

By 2018, the collective benefit of the upload of the Ontario Drug Benefit, Ontario Disability Support Program, along with the upload of Ontario Works benefits and court security costs, will result in a net annual benefit to municipalities of more than \$1.5 billion, compared to 2007. Though the benefit to municipalities will grow, as the sole costs become the province's.

We agreed in our consensus report that these social benefit program costs are costs that should not have been borne by property tax payers in the province.

While I know that many in this crowd would wish that these costs are uploaded fully by tomorrow, we are committed to uploading these costs, based on the schedule put forward in the report, and accelerating these

uploads, if the province has the fiscal capacity to do so in the future.

It is the responsible thing to do and we are proud of our track record in this regard.

When you combine the commitments of the Review with the many investments that we've already made, our government's projected total annual support to municipalities will be \$3.8 billion by 2018.

That is an increase of \$2.7 billion — about 250 per cent — since we took office.

Now for most people, these are just large numbers on a page.

I know that for you, and the residents in your communities, they can mean better road service, a new community centre or lower user fees.

You'll find examples of infrastructure projects all over Ontario.

In Goderich, the province is providing \$2.9 million for the renovation of the historic town hall.

The building, which was designed by Thomas Fuller, the architect of the original Parliament buildings in Ottawa, opened in 1889. It was originally a post office and customs house.

The renovation has proven to be quite a challenge for Mayor Deb Shewfelt, his council and staff.

They are dealing with a heritage building, which sits within a heritage district.

The project has to be sensitive to those imperatives, while taking into account modern-day needs like ensuring municipal services are accessible to its residents.

Even though weather has prevented workers from working on the building's exterior this winter, the project is expected to be completed by the end of the year and the residents of Goderich stand to benefit tremendously.

Meanwhile, northern communities have also been busy.

The Rink Roof Project in Nairn Centre opened to the public in February last year.

Reeve Brian Shannon and his Northern Ontario community received \$285,000 in funding for this project under the Rural Infrastructure Investment Initiative program.

The Municipality of Spanish, on the other hand, received \$498,000 under the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative for replacing the Crab Lake Road Bridge.

This bridge is a vital link to the northern part of the

township, serving tourism as well as the forest and aggregate industries.

It provides access to more than 50 cottages, and is an alternative emergency route for the traveling public, should Highway 17 be closed for any reason.

I understand that Mayor Gary Bishop and his officials are so enthusiastic about this project that they're creating a scrapbook about the entire process.

We see similar results in all regions of the province.

Barrie, for example, received more than \$12 million last Fall, as a result of the Investing in Ontario Act.

Today infrastructure spending in Ontario is two to three times higher than it was when our government took office.

And, thanks to a renewed partnership with the federal government, more infrastructure money is flowing due to Building Canada funding.

As many of you heard, earlier this month, local projects in smaller municipalities were announced.

For example, the Municipality of Neebing will receive \$443,000 in provincial assistance for constructing a new bridge to replace one that was decommissioned fifteen years ago.

In Bradford West Gwillimbury a provincial grant of over \$8 million will help build a new rec centre with two ice pads, a competition size swimming pool, a gym, fitness centre and a community centre.

The Township of Machin will receive more than \$150,000 in provincial assistance to repair and improve the Cascades Road bridge — a 70 year-old structure that provides access to residential and business areas within that northern municipality.

And these projects will not only benefit the community with new or renovated projects, they will create jobs.

As Timmins Mayor Tom Laughren told the local paper upon learning that the Barber's Bay bridge is receiving funding: "Not only are we benefiting from needed infrastructure improvements, this funding announcement will provide much needed construction jobs for our community."

Nous n'investissons pas seulement dans l'infrastructure.

Nous voulons développer l'économie des municipalités.

Notre gouvernement a établi le Fonds de développement économique de l'Est de l'Ontario pour aider à créer de nouveaux emplois et investir dans les nouvelles technologies, l'équipement et la formation axée sur les compétences pour les travailleurs.

The Eastern Ontario Development Fund will provide \$80 million over four years to that region.

To give just one example of how this fund works, the St. Albert Cheese Cooperative will receive \$1.3 million to retain 26 jobs and create 10 new jobs.

The company, which has been around since 1894, will invest in new production technologies so it can grow and serve larger markets.

As my caucus colleague Jean-Marc Lalonde said, “smaller businesses like St. Albert Cheese add value to the region’s economic competitiveness and diversity.”

I’ve eaten their cheese, and let me tell you, other markets, including Toronto, will enjoy their product.

If you were to ask me to sum up my view of what lies down the road, I would say that ultimately, I’m optimistic.

Now, if you would allow me, I would like to spend a moment or two talking about another important aspect of my portfolio- housing, specifically affordable housing.

We welcome the recent federal commitment to renew the Affordable Housing Initiative, the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy for another five years. They were scheduled to expire on March 31<sup>st</sup> of this year.

It is thanks to the tremendous passion that we all showed, with much credit going to the leadership shown by AMO that the federal government has come to the table with these much needed investments.

We welcome the commitments in last month's federal budget for social housing, seniors' housing, housing for people with disabilities, and on-reserve Aboriginal housing.

I had an encouraging conversation with Minister Diane Finlay before the budget, and I see it as a positive step forward.

We are not going to agree on all issues, but if we can build more affordable housing units for Ontarians in need that is a great thing and a partnership worth celebrating.

But short term funding solutions won't solve our long term problems.

We need a long term affordable housing strategy.

I have called on the federal government to join us as we launch our consultations later in the Spring for an Ontario affordable housing strategy.

With the value of Ontario's social housing stock estimated at some \$40 billion, it is essential that, collectively, we properly manage this valuable asset, and ensure its repair and renewal.

I know that we will reach better days — and I have absolutely no doubt we will emerge stronger in the end.

There are 444 municipalities in this great province, and each one is unique.

I know that each municipality brings a certain vibrancy, which together makes our province great.

These are rough times, but together we will continue succeeding.

I know that we share a vision for the road ahead, and together, we can work to get there.

Thank you.