



Report to Council

Department: Office of the CAO
Division: Office of the CAO
Date: February 17, 2025
Prepared by: Kate Giurissevich, CPA, CA
Report Number: Office of the CAO-2026-02
Subject: 2026 ROMA Delegation Summary
Number of Pages: 35 (including attachments)

Recommendation(s)

That Office of the CAO-2026-02 entitled 2026 ROMA Delegation Summary prepared by Kate Giurissevich, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer dated February 17, 2025 be received.

Purpose

To provide Council with an update and summary on the advocacy efforts undertaken by Town representatives at the 2026 Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) held in Toronto, Ontario from January 19th to January 21st, 2026.

Background and Discussion

The Town submitted, and was approved for, three delegations at the 2026 ROMA Conference. Each delegation is summarized below.

1) Ministry of Infrastructure (attached)

Attendees: Mayor Sherry Bondy, Deputy Mayor Rob Shepley, CAO Kate Giurissevich, Parliamentary Assistant Amarjot Sandhu

Summary:

The Town requested that the Ministry establish a flooding-specific infrastructure funding stream for municipalities that are flood-prone or have experienced repeated significant flood events. Climate change has increased the frequency and severity of extreme weather, forcing municipalities to design infrastructure for “100-year storms” that are now occurring every few years—at costs far beyond traditional like-for-like replacements. The August 2023 flooding in Harrow and Colchester, followed by another major rainfall event in Fall 2025, highlights the ongoing vulnerability of the region and the growing strain on municipal resources. Flooding has become so frequent that some insurance providers are limiting or denying coverage in high-risk areas. While programs exist to support residents after disasters, there is no dedicated funding to help municipalities proactively build resilient, future-proof flood mitigation infrastructure. A targeted provincial funding stream is essential to protect communities, reduce long-term recovery costs, and address the escalating impacts of flooding. The Ontario Community Infrastructure Funding the town receives is dedicated to the Town’s replacement of roadways and bridges and is not nearly sufficient to fund that program, let alone address this issue. The Town also inquired as to the denial of the application for the

grant application for the Harrow Raw Pump Station upgrades under this Ministries Health and Safety Stream.

Feedback Received

- The Minister explained the Ford government has announced a \$1.6 billion into this stream (the Town is monitoring when the next intake will open)
- He encouraged the Town to schedule a briefing call to review the application
- He encouraged the Town contact the Ministry of Natural Resources for potential assistance
- He requested our 2025 Asset Management Plan and Study be submitted

2) Ministry of Sports (attached)

Attendees: Mayor Sherry Bondy, Deputy Mayor Rob Shepley, CAO Kate Giurissevich, Minister Lumsden

Summary:

The Town of Essex discussed grant assistance from the Ministry of Sport to support the development of a 70-acre sports field and recreation complex purchased in 2016 for \$1.1 million. Despite longstanding plans, the project has not proceeded due to limited municipal funding and unsuccessful applications to past provincial programs, including the Ontario Sport and Recreation Fund and the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund. The need has become more urgent as the Town will lose two of its

four existing soccer fields in Essex Centre due to the Highway 3 expansion and required collector road. Developing the new site would replace lost facilities, serve residents across Essex County, and allow the vacated lands to be redeveloped for much-needed housing. With an estimated project cost of \$11.8 million, provincial funding support is critical to advancing this regional recreational asset.

Feedback Received

- The Minister explained that the fund had \$200 million available but received over \$1.25 billion in requests
- Applications with committed funding streams were preferred

3) Ministry of Education

Attendees: Mayor Sherry Bondy, Deputy Mayor Rob Shepley, CAO Kate Giurissevich, Parliamentary Assistant Jess Dixon

Summary:

The Town of Essex discussed the importance of long-standing shared-use recreation facilities agreements. Since 1998, the Town and the Greater Essex County District School Board have partnered in the operation of the Essex Recreation Complex, a 10,000 sq. ft. natatorium and gymnasium that serves the broader community. The facility welcomes nearly 50,000 pool participants annually, provides critical swim instruction including Swim to Survive programming, supports municipal day camps during school breaks, and offers gym access to more than 17,000 community users. Operated

under a cost-sharing model, the complex supports over 75 full-time, part-time, and student jobs and delivers significant recreational, educational, and public-safety benefits. Continued school board or provincial support is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of this vital community asset.

Feedback Received

- The Assistant Minister explained currently individual school boards are responsible for their own budgets, but the Ford government is exploring potential amalgamations and governance changes to various boards.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact because of this report. Should these advocacy items advance in any manner, they could have the potential to alleviate financial pressures on the Town, which would ultimately assist the tax base in the municipality.

Link to Strategic Priorities

- Embrace asset management best practices to build, maintain, and continuously improve our municipally owned infrastructure.
- Leverage our Town's competitive advantages to promote jobs and economic investment.
- Take care of our natural environment and strengthen the sense of belonging to everyone who makes Essex "home".
- Deliver friendly customer service in an efficient, effective, and transparent manner while providing an exceptional working environment for our employees.
- Build corporate-level and community-level climate resilience through community engagement and partnership and corporate objectives.