

Rural Ontario Municipalities Association Conference Report
Sunday, January 21 – Tuesday, January 23, 2024
Sheraton Centre Hotel
Toronto

Councillors Hinchberger, Kennedy, Steinhoff-Gray, and Mayor Craig (and 1800 other rural councillors and staff) attended this annual conference to hear updates on common interests and to present delegations to Provincial ministries.

As delegations, we spoke to:

- The Hon. Stephen Lecce – Minister of Education
- The Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho – Minister for Seniors and Accessibility
- Robin Martin – Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health
- Stephane Sarrazin – Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Energy
- Vijay Thanigasalam – Associate Minister of Transportation

Though we had specific requests of each ministry (new secondary school build, impending 2025 accessibility standards, doctor recruitment, the effects of new nuclear construction on small municipalities, and safety and development on the Highway 21 corridor), the message that was relayed in common to all the ministries was that we would like to have a voice in the conversations that will occur over the next several years regarding infrastructure projects, funding opportunities, and housing and development projects that will be generated due to the escalating demand for energy from the nuclear sector.

During the plenary sessions, we heard presentations from the Conservative, Liberal, NDP, and Green parties who spoke of their plans for Ontario's future. We heard panels talking about homelessness, the housing crisis, our indigenous relationships, and the polarization within the decision-making process, and more. The "bull pit", where the provincial cabinet minister panel takes questions from the floor, was another demonstration of how skilled elected officials can be in deflecting questions. One of the main requests of many municipalities, ours included, was for a revamped provincial funding model that more fully addresses the changing infrastructure costs faced by local communities.