

Report CCR-PCD 22-14

To: Chair Wright and Members of Planning and Community Development Committee

From: Meredith Bowers, Economic Development Officer

Meeting Date: June 17, 2014

Subject: **A Summary of the Ministry of Rural Affairs Rural Roadmap: The Path Forward for Ontario**

Status: Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution PCD70-14; Endorsed by County Council July 8, 2014 per Resolution CC90-14;

Recommendation

THAT Report CCR-PCD-22-14 regarding the Ministry of Rural Affairs recent Rural Roadmap: The Path Forward be received for information.

Background

The Ontario government established the Ministry of Rural Affairs (MRA) in February 2013 to ensure the voice of rural Ontario was well represented and its strengths are leveraged and unique needs addressed.

The MRA works to promote growth and opportunities for rural Ontario while supporting a high quality of life for its residents. In addition to launching several initiatives they also evaluated policies and programs proposed by other ministries to ensure that rural Ontario was not forgotten.

In February of 2014 the MRA hosted the first Rural Ontario Summit in Cobourg Ontario. The MRA strategically invited industry leaders from across all sectors both public and private from rural Ontario. Outcomes from the Summit identified four key priorities:

- Investing in People
- Investing in Infrastructure
- Investing in Business and Regions
- Continuing the Conversation

The Rural Ontario Roadmap is a document that outlines what has been done and what can be expected in 2015 from the MRA and other provincial ministries. The Roadmap lays the foundation for a dynamic rural plan for the coming years. The proposals that are in process have been advanced by the previous provincial government and it is hoped that whatever party comes to power this month will continue to recognize the importance of rural Ontario and support the initiatives that came out of the Rural Roadmap: The Path Forward.

Investing in People

Moving forward the MRA will be Improving Access to Rural Health Care with an additional \$20 million per year over the next three years. The commitment was made at the time when most hospital budgets were frozen. The Small Rural Hospital Transformation Fund will help improve patient care in 64 hospitals across the province. The Ontario Telehomecare Expansion Project will be building on the highly successful two year pilot. By 2015 the program will reach more than 30,000 patients in a number of Local Health Integration Networks.

The government committed \$42 million over the next three years to establish Ontario Online a Centre of Excellence in Technology-enabled learning, governed and operated by colleges and universities. The province will be investing \$3 million to prepare 200 people to become apprentices by providing training opportunities through the construction of the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games Infrastructure Projects. This program allows trainees to develop job skills and gain valuable work experience within skilled trades.

The government introduced the Ontario Immigration Act in February 2014 which would allow Ontario to set immigration targets and attract more skilled immigrants. The Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario (CIRRO) program will continue to deliver forward-thinking support to rural communities.

The province committed to improving the relationship with Aboriginal people by working together to create social and economic opportunities by finding meaningful employment and business development opportunities while working with the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs to adapt and develop tools and resources to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal people.

Investing in Infrastructure

Infrastructure is a shared responsibility; the province wants to continue to work with municipalities to ensure that recommendations and concerns are reflected in future plans. If Bill 141 (*Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act*) is passed the legislation will require the Province to regularly table a 10 year infrastructure plan, setting out

principles to improve infrastructure planning. The 2013 Budget commits the MRA and the Ministry of Infrastructure to develop a permanent rural municipal infrastructure program; this will include asset management planning and provide predictable, reliable and sustained funding. Access to affordable broadband connectivity at a globally competitive speed is essential when developing the framework that supports the growth of a digital economy. The MRA will continue to work with all levels of government, and stakeholders to find new ways to continue filling the gaps in broadband service in rural Ontario.

Investing in Business and Regions

The province recognizes the importance of business success and will cut taxes to business by \$265 million by 2016. The proposed Better Business Climate Act, if passed, will engage and promote other levels of government, business, academia, non-profit organization develop plans for regional economic clusters. The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) that came into effect on April 30, 2014 provides direction to recognize the diversity of Ontario's rural communities and their importance to the provincial economy.

The PPS will recognize the types of home industries and occupations on rural lands while supporting economic opportunities for agricultural uses in rural areas while providing greater flexibility for agriculture-related uses may be allowed on farms. The PPS will protect agricultural lands and ensure that farmers and rural communities can respond to economic development opportunities. The MRA will continue to work with their partners to coordinate the provision of tools and resources for rural economic development.

The Rural Economic Development Program (RED) will continue to help communities across Ontario become more investment- ready. The MRA will also work with the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment to help the rural manufacturing sector innovate and grow.

Continuing the Conversation

Ontario's Open Government initiative will open up more data and information and give residents new and improved ways to engage in decision making. To encourage open dialogue, the government will increase its engagement with residents of Ontario through current and new channels, ensuring that the public has a meaningful impact on decision making. The Ministry of Rural Affairs will ensure that the policies emerging from all provincial ministries take rural Ontario into account and will formalize an enhanced rural lens process to better understand potential implications of policies and programs on rural communities before they are introduced.

The MRA also plans to engage stakeholders on important rural issues leading up to the next Rural Ontario Summit; this input will be the building block for moving forward in reaching the vision and government priorities for rural Ontario. The MRA is accountable and will undertake a review of key rural specific metrics that will report on their progress in Rural Ontario.

As stated on the Ministry of Rural Affairs public facing website “Strong rural communities are the key to a strong, healthy province. Agriculture, forestry, mining and manufacturing sectors contribute greatly to the quality of life in Rural Ontario. Supporting the sectors that keep rural communities economically successful is a priority for the ministry and the province of Ontario.”

Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology

Considerations

Currently the proposals identified by the MRA are on hold pending the provincial election. It is hoped that regardless of the outcome of the election, the new government will take the time and interest to ensure policies and support is put in place to make sure that rural Ontario will be able to prosper and compete in the global market.

Of particular note for southwestern Ontario is the importance of the new Provincial government understanding and financially committing to the provision of broadband technology to rural residents and communities.

At this point there are no financial, staffing, legal or information technology considerations.

Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

Actions 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 under Goal number 1 of the County’s Strategic Plan, to enhance and diversify economic opportunities within the county, by becoming “investment- ready” and ensuring the foundation is in place for sustained success. By supporting initiatives that promote local business retention and expansion, including consideration of a business incubator centre. Support and promote initiatives that enhance the viability and diversification of agricultural operations and primary industries, both of which are important to the future of Grey County. Initiate environmental assessments and other necessary planning for strategic infrastructure projects to enable the county to be “shovel- ready” when upper level government funding opportunities become available and actively pursue provincial and federal funding to sustain municipal services and infrastructure.

Attachments

Attached is a full copy of the Ministry of Rural Affairs Rural Roadmap: The Path Forward for Ontario -[Rural Roadmap](#)

Respectfully submitted by,

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Economic Development Officer

Director Sign Off: *Sharon Vokes*