

# LUMCO submission to Ontario's 2020 Prebudget Consultation

Feb. 20, 2020

The Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario (LUMCO) is comprised of 29 mayors of Ontario cities with populations of 100,000 or more. LUMCO's membership grew by one member this year as Clarington's growth pushed its population over 100,000 residents.

LUMCO works closely with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and other municipal partners to advance the issues of Ontario's largest cities.

LUMCO members respect that the Government of Ontario has set ambitious goals for the reduction of its deficit. Municipalities understand balanced budgets and must deliver them every year.

We are ready, willing and able to contribute to continuous improvement in service delivery that leads to cost reductions and permanent savings.

Working together, we achieve this every time we cut costs by doing government better – whether it is by streamlining a process, reducing regulatory duplication, or cutting red tape.

The savings we achieve by doing government better – by delivering better value for taxpayer dollars – reflect government at its best.

What is not so good is downloading.

When Ontario and municipalities jointly fund a service, and Ontario unilaterally reduces its contribution to paying for that service without any plan to reduce the cost of the service, that is not government at its best. It just results in decreased services or higher taxes for the residents we collectively serve.

Our first message is this: we are your partners in delivering efficient government.

- Let us commit to working together as partners. Let's solve problems together through better, more efficient government – not passing the buck through downloading.
- LUMCO would like to work with AMO and the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction to advance Ontario's red tape reduction initiatives with special focus on overlap and duplication in provincial-municipal processes.

We have already seen promising signs of the benefits of working together.

We thank Minister Clark for the renewed commitment that he made in October to treat municipalities as a mature, autonomous order of government.

We support the plan to align municipal and provincial fiscal years to enhance cooperation and planning. We are ready to consult on implementation to help reduce administrative concerns with this change.

We also thank the government for creating the Audit and Accountability Fund. This initiative empowers municipalities to help create permanent improvements in value-for-money in service delivery and advance our shared goals of cost reduction. LUMCO will continue to advocate for enhancements to the fund and alignment with the Municipal Modernization Fund so members can prioritize implementation efforts that will save money or improve services.

We also acknowledge that at some level, every day, Ontario and LUMCO members are working to make investments in roads and transit projects, find efficiencies and help increase housing supply.

There is a lot of good work going on and we acknowledge the leadership of Premier Ford and his team. We thank Minister Clark and Minister Phillips for listening to our concerns, and look forward to continuing the dialogue, not just in the pre-budget consultation, but all year, every year.

LUMCO members are working hard to build a collective agenda that puts forward positive ideas to improve the quality of life for our residents. Below we have outlined the issues that we hope can guide the Ontario government as you craft a budget for 2020.

### **The Health of Our Communities**

As frontline service providers, we see the daily tragedy caused by illness associated with mental health and addictions. Whether it be opioids, meth or alcohol, the problem is growing, and in many instances, at a rate that is outpacing our ability to serve those in need.

It's a human tragedy. It is sapping community vitality and putting pressure on our budgets. As the challenge grows, it is vital that our collective response keep pace. In part, that is about dollars. But it is also about careful coordination between municipal and provincial service providers. This perspective aligns with AMO's recommendations to the province as part of the development of its Mental Health and Addictions strategy.

We all understand that supporting individuals in the grip of these challenges involves multidisciplinary approaches, ranging from health care workers, community support, emergency services and police, and supportive housing.

It is imperative that Ontario's new Ontario Health Team (OHT) model considers municipal services so that there are no gaps or unintended consequences associated with the new model.

Municipalities have many examples of the ways in which a lack of coordination can cause knock on effects. For example, Municipal EMS providers rely on provincially funded dedicated offload nurses to get ambulances back on the road quickly after a hospital drop off. If there are not enough offload nurses, ambulances get tied up, leaving a gap in the network. This is just one example that underscores the need for close coordination.

- Resourcing Public Health Ontario to support local health units could help municipalities tackle these challenges.
- Other provincial initiatives, like mandated Community Safety and Well-Being Plans and continued increases to mental health funding, can help address these challenges.

We want to work with Ontario to make this a priority for 2020 and beyond.

### **Addressing Gridlock:**

Too many communities are experiencing gridlock. It strangles our economy and reduces our quality of life.

We acknowledge the leadership of the Ontario government in advancing historic investments in transit in some LUMCO communities. We know there is the promise of more to come.

We support continued investment in transit to reflect the diversity of needs of the various communities in the province:

- Expansion of GO services
- Investment in local service appropriate to the community
- Active transportation, including bicycle paths

We look forward to further progress in 2020.

### **Access to Affordable Housing and ensuring Growth Pays for Growth**

LUMCO municipalities share Ontario's concern about the increasingly constrained housing market that motivated the Housing Supply Action Plan.

The ability to afford and maintain adequate housing is a key determinate of the health and vitality of a community. Ontario's housing crisis is diverse and connected to the shifting economic opportunities in our communities.

- Investment in supportive housing: Government investment needs to be focused on those who are most in need.
- Removing barriers to market housing: Given current fiscal conditions, only the market can deliver the volume of housing we need to address current gaps in supply. We need to continue to remove policy barriers that slow down and block the creation of new housing supply.
- Ensuring that growth pays for growth: Many of our members remain concerned that Bill 108, the *More Homes, More Choices Act*, along with the community benefits framework must maintain the ability of municipalities to ensure that growth pays for growth. A robust approach to consultation on the regulations and frameworks associated with Bill 108 is essential to ensuring municipalities can address the costs associated with growth.

LUMCO affirms its support for the following guiding principles for Bill 108-related changes articulated by the Municipal Finance Officers Association (MFOA) and echoed by AMO:

- Growth should pay for growth
- Complete vibrant communities are good for everyone
- Provincial legislation related to municipal governance should be enabling and permissive
- Provincial red tape costs municipalities time and money

### **Economic Competitiveness**

Overall growth in Ontario is strong, but benefits are shared disproportionately. Targeted plans that address regional realities and support the strengths of local workforces and geographies can help ensure all communities are participating in Ontario's prosperity.

Competitive disadvantage due to hydro, regulations and taxes can make it difficult for some LUMCO members to compete with their counterparts in other states and provinces.

Duplication between municipal and provincial approvals can reduce business productivity and add costs. LUMCO members also have professional, responsible city staff that can oversee initiatives without onerous oversight from provincial agencies.

- LUMCO encourages Ontario to continue to address the high cost of doing business in Ontario by continuing to reduce electricity rates.
- Continue to work with municipalities to reduce red tape.

### **Climate Change**

Climate change affects us all. Increased costs, especially for lakefront municipalities and municipalities with large waterways, can take away resources from other important services. Inclement weather, extreme weather events and changing climates can lead to eroding

shorelines, floods and increased road repairs. That is why it is important to advance the green infrastructure intake for Ontario's large municipalities.

- There is a need to develop and open a green infrastructure fund for municipalities with over 100,000 people. LUMCO members have shovel ready projects that will make our communities more sustainable, reduce costs for residents and help us address the growing costs of climate change.

## **Gun Violence**

Premier Ford has been a leader in prioritizing investments to reduce gun and gang violence in Ontario. Gun violence is directly connected to other gang activity such as drug trafficking and human trafficking and the province's public safety investments are helping our local police services tackle these issues.

- LUMCO supports continued and better coordination with our public safety activities across the province to develop an action plan.
- Adequately fund the Take Action Against Gun and Gang Violence initiative and consult with LUMCO to ensure that there is support for community-level prevention and enforcement efforts.
- Focus and strengthen the strict implementation of laws over gun sales and the inspection of gun dealers and shooting ranges.

## **Conclusion**

LUMCO looks forward to working with the Ontario government to improve our communities.

Evidence shows that when Ontario works together with municipalities, positive results follow. Conversely, unanticipated transfer reductions can cause unintended consequences for the province and municipalities.

LUMCO looks forward charting a course forward for improving Ontario's cities. We will lead with ideas and advocacy that enhance our cities, and work closely with AMO and the provincial government. LUMCO members will work collaboratively to implement the decisions made in Budget 2020 that will strengthen our communities and our people.