

IN GOOD COMPANY: 1.5 Million Reasons

1.5 Million Reasons to Attend the FCM Conference

By Mayor Geoffrey Dawe

As many of you know from reports in our local news media, the 2013 Federation of Canadian Municipalities Annual Conference and Trade Show took place from May 31 to June 3.

I and six other members of Aurora Town Council had the opportunity to attend this important gathering of civic leaders to discuss solutions for transit in Greater Toronto, infrastructure renewal, sustainable funding and other numerous issues facing municipalities across Canada.

I make it a point to attend the FCM Conference every other year. It is the only national forum where municipal priorities and consensus-building on municipal needs take place. Its value and importance are undeniable to the welfare of our communities and ? as was often mentioned in the workshops ? you're either at the table ? or you're lunch!?

Each year, the conference has intense media coverage. Many media outlets expound upon the visions for our municipalities articulated by the keynote speakers, including 2013 participants NDP leader and Leader of the Opposition Thomas Mulclair, Justin Trudeau, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada and Denis Lebel, Federal Transportation Minister.

Others take a different tack, choosing the path of criticism.

Critical analysis of the conference proceedings and discussions is a good thing, to quote domestic maven Martha Stewart.

I appreciate dissection of policy and practice to ensure that what emerges from these discussions is valuable to our communities and our taxpayers. It helps to provide accountability, something I've expounded upon at great length in my monthly article in The Auroran.

During this year's conference; however, criticism seemed to focus on the expense of sending councillors to the weekend proceedings. The rumblings of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, who skipped the conference and criticized those who attended, certainly added no shortage of flavour to this discussion.

Sadly, what was seemingly lost on the mayor of Canada's largest city was that while he griped, not only did his multi-billion dollar vision for transit in Toronto continue to gather dust, those who attended the FCM Conference meticulously worked to craft and hone a workable transit solution for Greater Toronto in his absence.

For the record, The Town of Aurora budgeted \$27,000 this year to cover conference expenses for Councillors. This amount was approved on consent by our Council during budget deliberations. Actual conference expenses are publicly disclosed twice annually on our website.

I firmly believe using these funds to participate in one of the most important municipal forums in the country represents an invaluable and indispensable investment in our community.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities is directly responsible for convincing the Government of Canada to invest \$4.4 billion dollars in infrastructure for communities across the country through the GST Refund, Building Canada Fund, Public Private Partnership Fund, Green Infrastructure Fund, Community Infrastructure Investment Fund and Gas Tax Fund.

The Gas Tax Fund is particularly notable. Since 2006, The Town of Aurora has received more than \$7 million for infrastructure from this fund. This funding model was developed by FCM through discussion and consensus-building by municipal leaders at the annual conference. In this year's federal budget, this fund was indexed to overcome the eroding power of inflation. This too was the direct result of ongoing discussions at FCM, something the Minister of Finance noted in his budget speech.

The Town of Aurora will receive nearly \$1.5 million in 2013 from the Gas Tax Fund. This money will help keep our roads in working order, provide lighting for safer driving and fund sidewalks for families to use. When members of our media ask why I attend the FCM Conference, I'm happy to tell them ?I have 1.5 million reasons to go.?

I am pleased that several of our Councillors were able to attend. Consensus-building doesn't happen with a minority of representatives. Multiple representatives also help ensure that opportunities don't get missed.

Case in point, Councillors Abel, Thompson and I had the chance to speak to Bernard Lord, former Premier of New Brunswick, who is now the President and CEO of the Canadian Wireless and Telecommunications Association. With our ongoing concerns about lax cellular tower siting and communication protocols, Mr. Lord's comments were particularly insightful and gave us the opportunity to express our concerns to someone with the ability to effect change in the telecommunications industry.

Opportunities like this don't just happen. You make them. The FCM Conference is full of these opportunities and I look forward to seizing future chances to participate and secure a prosperous future for Aurora.

After a tempestuous spring, our warming weather is just in time for our upcoming Canada Day and Aurora 150 celebrations from June 29 to July 1. The many family-friendly activities include the Youth Music Extravaganza, Dance in the Park featuring Lighthouse and our parade and fireworks. It's a great chance to show your civic pride. I hope to see you there!