

**REPORT TO:** Mayor and Members of Council

**PREPARED BY:** Ashley Cook, Director of Corporate Services / Municipal Clerk,  
Felicia Krista, Manager of Economic Development & Community Engagement,  
Anica Peter, Manager of Human Resources and Health & Safety

**DEPARTMENT:** Corporate Services, Administrative and Finance, Economic  
Development

**DIVISION:** Clerk, Economic Development, Human Resources

**MEETING DATE:** May 6, 2026

**SUBJECT:** RTC – Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference 2026

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**LINK TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

**Staff, Culture, Work Environment** By providing high-quality public services

**BACKGROUND**

The Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Annual Conference is a key provincial event that brings together municipal elected officials, staff, and provincial representatives to discuss issues affecting rural municipalities across Ontario. The conference provides a forum for advocacy, policy dialogue, and knowledge-sharing on priority matters such as infrastructure, housing, emergency services, economic development, and municipal finance. The conference was held January 18-20, 2026, at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel in Toronto, Ontario.

<https://www.roma.on.ca/ontarios-rural-leaders-conference/program>

**DISCUSSION**

The Director of Corporate Services / Clerk, Manager of Economic Development & Community Engagement, and Manager of Human Resources and Health & Safety attended the 2026 ROMA Conference held January 18–20, 2026, at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel in Toronto, Ontario.

Programming included keynote presentations, ministerial forums, workshops, and concurrent sessions focused on key rural municipal issues such as infrastructure, housing, governance, economic development, and emergency services.

### **1. Strengthening Municipal–Provincial Relationships**

A central component of the conference was participation in delegation meetings and discussions with provincial ministries, including direct engagement with the Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

These interactions supported:

- Advocacy for municipal priorities such as infrastructure funding and housing needs
- Alignment of local initiatives with provincial programs
- Identification of funding opportunities and resources

The conference reinforced the importance of maintaining strong, collaborative relationships with provincial partners to effectively advance municipal priorities.

### **2. Accurate and Transparent Communication with Residents**

Sessions emphasized the growing importance of clear, accurate, and timely communication in an environment of declining local journalism and increasing misinformation.

Key takeaways included:

- The need for proactive and transparent communication strategies
- Ensuring residents are well-informed on municipal decisions and services
- Building public trust through clarity, accessibility, and accountability

Examples from municipalities such as Clarington and Port Hope highlighted innovative approaches to engaging residents and businesses effectively.

### **3. Indigenous and Municipal Relationships**

The conference highlighted the importance of strengthening relationships between municipalities and Indigenous communities.

Key themes included:

- Building respectful and collaborative partnerships
- Supporting meaningful engagement and ongoing dialogue

- Recognizing shared priorities and opportunities for growth

These discussions reinforced the importance of continued relationship-building to support inclusive and respectful community development.

#### **4. Governance and Code of Conduct**

Sessions focused on evolving expectations surrounding governance and accountability, particularly regarding updated municipal codes of conduct.

Discussion points included:

- Roles and responsibilities of Council members
- Accountability frameworks and enforcement mechanisms
- Managing complaints and maintaining professional conduct

These insights emphasized the increasing expectations placed on municipal leadership to uphold integrity and public trust.

#### **5. Broader Rural Priorities and Emerging Issues**

The conference addressed a wide range of ongoing and emerging challenges impacting rural municipalities, including:

- Infrastructure pressures and asset management planning
- Housing development and economic growth
- Healthcare access in rural communities
- Connectivity and broadband infrastructure

These discussions highlighted the continued need for collaboration across all levels of government.

#### **6. Networking and Knowledge Sharing**

Staff had the opportunity to network with Members of Provincial Parliament, including Lambton–Kent–Middlesex MPP Steve Pinsonneault, as well as municipal leaders, Chief Administrative Officers, and sector professionals.

The Welcome Reception and Trade Show further supported:

- Relationship building

- Sharing of best practices
- Collaboration across municipalities

These interactions contribute to continuous improvement and innovation within the Municipality of North Middlesex.

### **FINANCIAL**

Costs associated with conference attendance were included and approved in the 2026 Budget.

### **ATTACHMENT**

- N/A

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Reviewed By: Ralph D'Alessandro, Director of Finance /Treasurer

Approved By: Samuel Shannon, Interim Chief Administrative Officer