

Rural Mayors' Forum of Eastern Ontario created

Faced with common needs and common problems, the mayors and reeves of 13 small rural municipalities have joined forces, creating a Rural Mayors' Forum of Eastern Ontario.

The seeds of this forum originated in the summer of 2015 when Mayor Glenda McKay of Greater Madawaska and Mayor Ron Higgins of North Frontenac met to discuss shared services, common issues and the need to work together. Within months, that meeting led to the formation of the Rural Mayor's Forum of Eastern Ontario (RMFEO).

Members of the Forum ? 13 small rural municipalities in Eastern Ontario ? have committed to work together to address common issues and identify opportunities for cost reductions, thereby forging a unified voice. Concern was expressed that organizations such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) focus primarily on urban centres and the advocacy work of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) includes much larger municipalities. To date, RMFEO has held two meetings and has crafted a mission, vision and objectives. Its specific mission is to identify opportunities for collaboration to improve operational effectiveness and long-term sustainability, with a vision to work closely with stakeholders to coordinate common goals. Over the coming months a strategy will be put in place to communicate and work with other organizations and government bodies.

The RMFEO believes that there is very little discussion and collaboration with small rural municipalities. Small rural municipalities have a very limited tax base and are fiscally strapped to support infrastructure or to fund downloaded services from the provincial government. To address this, RMFEO will be working towards the implementation of provincial and federal policies and funding opportunities that speak to the needs and challenges of small rural municipalities in a collaborative and transparent manner.

While many will say that the government is already working with rural municipalities, RMFEO stresses that the rural voice has not been well represented or fully involved in the development and implementation of major federal or provincial policies and funding opportunities. Over the coming months, RMFEO will be publicizing its strategy and seeking out other partners throughout Ontario to initiate collaborative discussions aimed at ensuring that small rural communities in Eastern Ontario and elsewhere have favourable and equitable representation.

RMFEO membership includes 13 municipalities with representation from the Counties of Hastings, Lennox and Addington, Renfrew Frontenac and Lanark. The Municipalities include Addington Highlands, Brudenell Lyndoch and Raglan, Arnprior, Central Frontenac, Greater Madawaska, Hastings Highlands, Horton, Lanark Highlands, Madawaska Valley, McNab/Braeside, Mississippi Mills, North Frontenac and United Townships of Head Clara Maria. Contact: ruralmfeo@gmail.com

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