



Queen's Park Report

Challenges Still Facing the Liberal Government Over the Next Four Years

The Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods of Ontario congratulates Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party on their re-election as the Government of Ontario. The Ontario voters have endorsed the direction that the Liberals are going in education, planning and land preservation, health care improvements and clean water legislation. However, there is still much to be done.

Urban Infrastructure: Downloading onto urban governments has created real problems for cities who are attempting to maintain their infrastructure. There must be more support for urban areas from the provincial government.

Affordable Housing: The deterioration of the current public housing stock and the lack of affordable housing for many families in our urban areas must be addressed. The problems faced by colleges and universities in providing student housing require attention.

Public Transportation: With the dual threats of peak oil and global warming, the need to shift resources to public transportation systems such as subway, rail, bus and ship and away from highways for trucks and cars is urgent.

Environment: There is more emphasis needed on Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. More financial penalties must be levied on wasters and polluters and more incentives given for good environmental practices. Hybrid cars must be made as economical as non-hybrids rather than having significantly higher prices even with the financial rebates.

Energy: There must be shifts to wiser use of our energy sources – sun, wind, water, nuclear and fossil fuels. We must increase our utilization of energy sources that do not increase global warming. We must reserve our rapidly depleting natural gas supplies for heating homes rather than producing electricity or processing oil sands to produce gasoline for automobiles. We must forbid the use of corn crops (food) for the production of ethanol at such a great waste of land, fertilizers and water.

Protection of Arable Land: It is becoming more and more evident that global warming and "peak oil" will make it increasingly difficult to produce sufficient food to supply North America, let alone the whole world. Every subdivision built on farmland will result in increased food shortages in the future, a future that is becoming closer faster than most people believe.

Education: Ontario voters have made it quite clear that they will not tolerate public funding for religious schools. The problems of funding religious schools for only one religion remain troublesome. It might be useful to establish a commission to study how the public and separate school systems could be combined and what savings would result from such a merger.

Great Lakes: The Great Lakes are a source of tremendous wealth, both environmental and economic. But we are learning that their resilience has its limits. Decades of neglect and constant threats have placed the environmental integrity of the lakes at the tipping point, and we must take action before it's too late. A **Great Lakes Blueprint** was released by six environmental organizations in September that details eight key priorities for protecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River as a significant natural, cultural and economic entity. Action is urgently needed on these priorities.

Ontario Municipal Board: The OMB consistently dismisses testimony of concerned citizens and even residents most deeply affected by the applications under review in favour of what is termed "expert testimony" from people who have been hired to show the application in a favourable light. Thus we tend to have developments approved that are not in the best interests of the community nor likely to be sustainable in future years when the dual impacts of global warming and peak oil are felt. It is the strong belief of our Federation and its community associations across the Province of Ontario that there is an urgent need for the development of an Advisory Committee that brings citizen input to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Municipal Elections Act: This Act is in urgent need of reform. Currently it is almost impossible to defeat an incumbent because of the huge advantages they enjoy. In addition, funding from corporations and trade unions makes citizens suspect that their municipal politicians are being unduly influenced by developers or unions.

Ontario Elections Act: Here also there is a need to prohibit contributions from corporations and trade unions. This has already been enacted at the federal level.

Municipal Property Assessment: The volatile increases in property assessment have created hardships for many low and middle-income families who are trying to retain ownership of houses that have been in their families for generations. There needs to be some form of capping to phase in large property assessment increases. Property tax must also be relieved from supporting social services that should be paid for by other taxes such as income tax.

The Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods of Ontario looks forward to working with the McGuinty Government over the next four years. Our Member Associations from all across Ontario are able to provide insights into policies and legislation being considered by the Government and are pleased to cooperate with the Government and staff in its consultations on such matters as we have done in the past.

Please e-mail a copy of this Report to anyone that you think might be interested.

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