



2023 OCC AGM PROPOSED
POLICY RESOLUTIONS
COMPENDIUM



Preface

This booklet contains the proposed policy resolutions for debate at the Annual General Meeting of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce on **April 29, 2023**. These resolutions were developed and submitted by our network of chambers of commerce and boards of trade.

Each resolution has been reviewed by the Policy and Advocacy Committee (PAC), a subcommittee of the OCC's Board of Directors, comprised of representatives from both our chamber and corporate memberships

The PAC is mandated to ensure that all resolutions presented on the floor for discussion are:

- Business issues.
- Provincial in scope or impact.
- Deemed important enough to be on the legislative agenda of the government or be of considerable concern to a majority of members.
- Not pitting one industry or region of Ontario against another.
- Not duplicative of any existing resolutions.

During the debate, resolutions will be discussed before voting delegates are asked to **adopt, defeat, or refer the resolution to the Board of Directors for further study**.

Policy resolutions adopted at the AGM will become part of the Ontario Chamber's advocacy agenda for the next three years.

The resolutions contained within this book are also available on the OCC website at occ.ca

Resolutions Debate Procedures

Prior to debating the proposed resolutions, a motion will be presented to place the entire policy book on the floor (this prevents the need for a motion to adopt each resolution as it comes up).

Resolution Debate

1. The discussion of each resolution will open with the moderator naming the resolution. A representative of the sponsoring group (submitting chamber/board of trade) is entitled to make a brief comment (approximately one minute) to amplify or clarify their resolutions. If the OCC PAC has indicated that they do not support the proposed resolution, a committee representative will be offered an opportunity to comment briefly before the resolution is opened for discussion by all delegates.
2. Although everyone is allowed to participate in the debate, only voting delegates have the right to move or second motions, amendments or other motions to vote.
3. Wait to be recognized by the moderator and then identify yourself and your organization before you begin your remarks.
4. Due to limited time for policy debates, we encourage all delegates to keep their commentary concise.
5. You are responsible to make your voting decisions in accordance with your beliefs about what is in the best interests of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce policy agenda. Delegates have three possible courses of action for each resolution:
 - a. **To adopt it** – with or without amendments – thus making it official OCC policy
 - b. **To defeat it**; or
 - c. **To refer it to the Board of Directors for further study**. While this precludes the item from becoming official policy at the time of the AGM, it does permit the board to act upon it.
6. The policy debate is governed by Robert's Rules of Order. It is OCC policy to require a 50% plus one of the voting delegates to pass any motion or amendment.

**2023 OCC AGM
Proposed Policy Resolutions**

1. Accounting for economic outcomes in regional collaboration projects.....	5
2. Achieving Property Tax Fairness Across Ontario	7
3. Address Ontario’s labour shortage through reforms of the immigration system	9
4. Addressing Housing Shortage by Updating the Approvals Process	10
5. Addressing Mental Health Restrictions to Allow a Positive and Safe Return to Work	12
6. Addressing the Challenges of Ontario’s Largest Economic Sector: Small Business	13
7. WSIB Policy and Procedural Changes to Employer Counts and Costs	15
8. Align the Province of Ontario’s Framework on Carbon Capture and Sequestration with Global Jurisdictions.....	18
9. Attracting and Retaining Highly Skilled Talent	20
10. Building Rural Transportation and Transit Infrastructure.....	22
11. Changes to Alcohol Retail in Ontario Need to Support Local Industry and Jobs in the Wine and Grape Sector.....	24
12. Diversifying healthcare to ease the burden on Emergency Rooms and family doctors	26
13. Empower the development of housing in Ontario.....	28
14. Establish a Business Energy Audit Program.....	30
15. Extend exemptions for the Non-Resident Speculation Tax	31
16. Fostering Electric Vehicle Success in Ontario.....	33
17. Healthcare Crisis: Demands Exceed Supply	36
18. Ignite the development of the Ring of Fire	37
19. Improve Early Childhood Educational Outcomes Through Expanded Education Opportunities, Targeted Programming, and Innovation in the Classroom	40
20. Improving Skilled Trades in the Secondary Schools	43
21. In the Spirit of Business	44
22. Industry, educational institutions, and government working collaboratively in developing and advancing Ontario’s skilled labour workforce with the skills required to meet industry needs.....	46
23. Invest in Workforce Planning Boards.....	48
24. Investing in Ontario's International Undergraduate Student Entrepreneurs	50
25. Making the Ontario Energy Board hearing process more accessible	52
26. More systems needed in place to encourage women to pursue a career in skilled trades	54
27. Ontario’s Readiness for Urban Mobility – Smart cities and digital transformation	57
28. Ontario's Residential Tenancies Act.....	59
29. Opening the Job Market for Employers and Employees	62
30. Reducing Traffic Congestion On Ontario Highways Due to Vehicular Accidents	65
31. Regional Approach to Provincial Procurement Reform.....	68

32. Regional Transportation Fare Integration.....	70
33. Simplify information sharing to improve specialized mental health care for people experiencing homelessness.....	72
34. Strengthen Connectivity Between Businesses and Post-Secondary Institutions.....	74
35. Support for Metrolinx Big Move and ‘Next Wave’ Priority Projects	76
36. Support for the renewal of the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport Tripartite Agreement.....	78
37. Supporting Accurate Mapping Layers That Bolsters Reliable Broadband Accessibility for Ontarians	80
38. Supporting Ontario Contractors and Expediting Infrastructure Builds by Addressing the Backlog of Ontario One Call Locate Requests Through Adaptive Technological Innovation	82
39. Supporting Ontario Craft Beverage Alcohol Producers By Updating AGCO Liquor License Rules.....	84
40. Supporting Safer and Healthier communities through a Detox Centre in a collaborative approach when dealing with those experiencing Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions.....	87
41. Tax Rebates for Home Care.....	89
42. The Workforce Ontario Needs	91
43. Zoning preservation of Crucial Employment (Manufacturing, Retail and Warehousing) Lands	93

1. Accounting for economic outcomes in regional collaboration projects

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Richmond Hill Board of Trade

Issue

Jobs created during collaborative regional economic development projects are only attributed to the municipality in which they are geographically located.

Background

“Ontario’s economy is undergoing a period of rapid change. Twenty-first century globalization, urbanization, and technological transformation are challenging the status quo and redefining what it means to be competitive. Given these and other pressures, Ontario’s overall prosperity will increasingly depend on the strength of its regions.” - This is how the 2019 report from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce titled “The Great Mosaic – Reviving Ontario’s Regional Economies” starts.

It’s fitting to start a discussion around how to then calculate economic impacts. Municipalities impacted by “A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe” are bound by provincial legislation to have official plans, land needs assessments, and zoning by-laws in place that detail how each municipality is going to achieve the pre-determined milestones of jobs and residents per hectare. Those results are then reported to the province.

While these plans and processes are necessary, they don’t account for the fact that more and more economic development is collaborative, crossing geographic lines. One example can be found in the City of Peterborough. The city has contributed significant dollars to infrastructure at the regional airport that lies just outside its geographical boundary. The combined investment by the city, county and local township has resulted in the number of jobs increasing from 50 to over 300 over the past decade. The question becomes how is the outcome of those investments (jobs, new economic opportunities, etc..) accounted for in growth targets? Right now, the outcome falls to the municipality in which the tangible asset exists – therefore, we are back to geographical boundaries regardless it being a regional collaboration.

This disconnect between investment and reporting rules is a barrier to regional economic development because the value of the investment is diminished when the result is not recognized. To resolve this issue and encourage more regional collaboration that will benefit all of Ontario, we ask that government amend the reporting rules and allow all municipalities to account for the jobs they have helped create through regional projects.

The Growth Plan document identifies a need for complete communities with the following paragraph in section 2.1;

“To support the achievement of complete communities, this plan establishes minimum intensification and density targets that recognize the diversity of communities across the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). Some larger urban centres, such as Toronto, have already met some of the minimum targets established in this plan, while other communities are growing and intensifying at a different pace that reflects their local context.”

This allowance will encourage more collaboration across geographical lines by municipalities and help regions invest in projects that will benefit their area and the province as a whole. It will also more accurately reflect the local context of the urban rural mix in the outer ring municipalities. These outer ring municipalities also address issues such as transit and conservation issues across geographical lines, yet recognition of the impact of regional economic development on multiple municipalities does not happen.

Continuing in 2.1 is the following;

“...consider opportunities to better co-ordinate our collective efforts across municipalities to support their contribution to economic growth and improve access to transit.” If this call is to be realized to its maximum potential then there has to be allowance to recognize the impact of jobs created and economic impact when municipalities work together.

Recommendation

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Develop a mechanism that allows for multiple municipalities who have invested in a regionally significant project to account for jobs created proportional to financial contribution when reporting to government.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

2. Achieving Property Tax Fairness Across Ontario

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Commercial and industrial payers contribute significantly to Ontario's property tax base, which is the primary source of revenue for municipal government. However, real concerns about the benefits received by businesses versus residential taxpayers, and the rationale for the notable disparity in tax treatment between residential and non-residential ratepayers, continue to persist. Put plainly, the proportion of property value and the resulting tax contributions made by these two distinct groups of property owners relative to the overall tax revenue collected by municipalities for the services they consume are vastly different and inequitable. This trend affects commercial and industrial enterprises of all sizes and across all sectors and is pervasive in communities across the province.

Background

Ontario's Property Tax system has not been fully reviewed since the new Ontario Fair Assessment System (OFAS) was first introduced by the former Harris government approximately 25 years ago.

Since that time, significant changes have occurred across Ontario's economic landscape influencing global and local competitiveness, and fundamentally altering traditional economic paradigms. This trend has been further compounded by increasing demands placed on municipalities as they are confronted with new and evolving challenges such as: social housing, the opioid crisis, climate change, rapidly evolving technology, and the growing infrastructure deficit. This list goes on.

While municipalities are alive to such concerns and as pressure on the property tax increases, the municipality community is faced with the daunting task of attempting to balance their fiscal realities against growing and competing demands for local and regional services. This is against the backdrop of significant budgetary demands caused by inflation, raising interest rates and upward wage pressures on both non-unionized and unionized positions. With municipalities considering budget increases in the ranges of 4-8%, the impact to business will be significant, and in some circumstances, businesses may be paying upwards of 8.5 times that of a residential property.

This situation is compounded by the limited revenue tools available to municipalities to meet their financial obligations and an antiquated system of property tax mitigation programs and relief mechanisms to achieve locally sensitive tax policy priorities that have not been comprehensively revisited or reformed since the mid-1990's.

It is also important to note that property tax bills in Ontario include a substantial portion of the total levy that is directed toward the province to fund our education system. In many cases, this share of the property tax bill (known as the provincial education tax) exceeds the amount collected for municipal purposes. While the province has taken measures to reduce the "Education Tax", the disparity in terms of tax rate treatment between non-residential and residential property owners for municipal purposes remains extreme when the education tax rate is considered, further exacerbating the disproportionate property tax burden shouldered by commercial and industrial property owners and their tenants.

When property tax is unfavourably biased against the business community, the province's economic competitiveness, its ability to attract and retain talent and investment, create jobs, and to position Ontario for growth and prosperity, are undermined.

In acknowledging the shortcomings of Ontario's current property tax system, the province made a promise in its 2019 Spring Budget to develop an action plan to *Respect Ontario Property Taxpayers*, underpinned by a comprehensive review to explore opportunities to:

- Enhance the accuracy and stability of property assessments;
- Support a competitive business environment;
- Provide relief to residents; and
- Strengthen the governance and accountability of the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) to ensure better representation for Ontario property taxpayers.

To support a meaningful and informed review process, the government committed to seek input on these issues through consultation with residents, businesses, municipalities and other stakeholders.

Thus far, no plan has been revealed to fulfill this promise. However, recognizing that 2023 or 2024 are potential years in which MPAC will undertake a comprehensive province-wide reassessment (re-evaluation) of all property to provide the basis for property taxation in 2021 through 2024, the timing of a thorough and thoughtful review of Ontario's property tax system, with a focus on modernization to ensure competitiveness, is crucial to inform transparent, stable and equitable property tax treatment for the future.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Honour its 2019 Budget Commitment to ensure a modern and competitive property tax system, and to develop an action plan to respect Ontario's property taxpayers based on meaningful and thoughtful consultation and collaboration with affected stakeholders which includes: residents, businesses, industries, municipalities, and field experts.
2. Consider providing new revenue and/or property tax mitigation tools with flexibility to municipalities in order to manage property tax burdens in a fair and equitable manner, address new economic paradigms, and to target relief to business property owners/tenants in response to local tax policy priorities and objectives.
3. Continue to address the significant disparity between residential and non-residential tax rates for education tax purposes.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

3. Address Ontario's labour shortage through reforms of the immigration system

Submitted by: The Vaughan Chamber of Commerce & Newmarket Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The industries in Ontario are facing a critical shortage of skilled labour. The shortage is particularly dire in the construction sector. This decade will see the anticipated retirement of more than 86,000 construction workers in Ontario. Considering the projected volume of work, industry will need to hire, train, and retain almost 100,000 additional workers by the end of the decade. The labour supply shortage is one of the single biggest challenges facing the Ontario construction market today and threatens our ability to build the critical core infrastructure and homes Ontarians need.

Background

Historically the construction industry in the province has relied on immigration to fill a significant percentage of its ranks. New immigrants to the province have played a critical role in building this province over the last few decades. However, beginning in the mid-90s, the immigration system changed to value educational attainment and language requirements over specific, practical skill sets.

At the time, our economy was in a much different place than it is today, with much higher unemployment in the construction industry and much less public and private investment in infrastructure and land/commercial development. Times have changed and, economically, we have returned to a place where we are in much greater need of specific skills sets (particularly those that would fall under National Occupational Classification (NOC) level C and D in the immigration system) to fill the demand in our province, especially for infrastructure and residential construction. NOC level C refers to occupations that may require a high school diploma, while NOC level D occupations generally call for on-the-job training.

The issue is that many of the jobs that are in critical demand do not require certification or a particular level of educational attainment. As such, there are serious limits for construction companies to access the immigration system. For example, the in-demand jobs in infrastructure and residential construction are not prioritized in our express entry system; there are serious limits for how our small and medium-sized enterprises can participate in the temporary foreign worker program; the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) is incredibly onerous and expensive for smaller companies to participate in.

Recommendations

The Vaughan and Newmarket Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. At least double the allocations for the National Occupational Classification-Level C (NOC C) Pilot that aims to increase permanent resident pathways for in-demand workers with Ontario job offers. Industry is ready and able to get more people working if the people are allowed to enter.
2. Ensuring that the application process for various OINP streams, particularly the In-Demand Skills stream, is not overly onerous as to disincentivize employers, especially small and-medium sized ones, from participating.
3. Continue working collaboratively with the federal government to ensure that Ontario benefits from any immigration reforms that take place.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

4. Addressing Housing Shortage by Updating the Approvals Process

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: The Vaughan Chamber of Commerce and Newmarket Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The current approvals process for housing developments is inefficient and directly contributes to the housing shortage in the province.

Background

Successive governments have underinvested in Ontario's infrastructure, with the expected total investment over the next five years at 2.65% of provincial GDP – less than half the target investment (5.4%) for long-term growth.¹

The trend of underinvestment in infrastructure has been a consistent trend going back to the 1960s and 1970s, at the same time as Ontario's population had been growing by 1.5 per annum since 1970.²

Compounding the current housing issues is the fact that Provincial housing developments have stagnated.³

This underinvestment has been exacerbated by a slow approvals system, with over 100,000 proposed housing units across Ontario are waiting for development.

Some of the most prominent reasons for these flawed approvals process are:

- Outdated processes: Including areas such as zoning and building and planning permits.
- Poor communication and transparency, specifically pertaining to the relationship between municipalities and the Provincial government.
- No repercussions for municipalities missing targets for updating out of date zoning, resulting in a lack of accountability and no internal direction to solve the issue.

The government has taken steps to resolve these concerns through Bill 23; *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*, which includes provisions to develop more housing and mandates a reduction in decision making time. While these steps may address some of the issues, they do not provide the fundamental alterations required to fix the process.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Work closely with municipalities to streamline housing development approval processes, including by supporting municipalities in implementing changes and accelerating the adoption of digital platforms (e.g., e-permitting).
2. Develop a shared common data platform that will help the province to establish a comprehensive e-permitting system where agencies and municipalities can link together. This can be used to streamline the application and approvals process to ensure there is no miscommunication between the Provincial and Municipal governments, while simultaneously allowing all parties to track applications.

¹ <https://rccao.com/research/files/RCCAO-CANCEA-Infra-Bulletin-May-22-2019.pdf>

² <https://rccao.com/research/files/Investing-in-Ont-Infra-PAR-Oct-2015.pdf>

³ <https://rccao.com/research/files/RCCAO-CANCEA-Infra-Bulletin-May-22-2019.pdf>

3. Promote greater transparency in the process, possibly by legislative means or by commissioning a body in place of the Ontario Land Tribunal. At minimum, there should be the aforementioned web-based system which gives both developers and buyers sufficient information to understand the process.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

5. Addressing Mental Health Restrictions to Allow a Positive and Safe Return to Work

Submitted by: The Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade

Issue

After a workplace injury and to allow the worker return to work, their health care provider normally prepares and submits to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board a Functional Abilities Form. This form is then used by the employer to develop a positive and safe return to work plan, with appropriate accommodations. Unfortunately, the current form is limited to detailing only the worker's physical health restrictions (e.g., lifting, carrying, etc.). As a result, the employer is left without knowledge of any mental health restrictions (e.g., concentration restrictions, memory restrictions, stress restrictions, etc.). This is particularly of concern where the worker is employed in a safety sensitive position. Accordingly, the form needs to be updated to also address mental health restrictions.

Background

When a worker is injured at work in Ontario, insurance coverage is often provided by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). Furthermore, a claim is filed with the WSIB, the WSIB then provides wage-loss benefits, medical coverage, and support to help the worker return to work. As part of returning the worker to work, the worker's health care provider completes the WSIB's Functional Abilities Form (FAF). This form has clear and specific checkboxes to be completed to allow the WSIB and the employer to understand any restrictions. Unfortunately, the FAF is limited to only physical restrictions. In particular, the FAF asks the health care provider about lifting restrictions, standing restrictions, sitting restrictions, etc. The FAF does not ask health care provider about mental restrictions, such as concentration restrictions, memory restrictions, and problem-solving restrictions. As a result, a worker may return to work with proper accommodation for their physical restrictions, but without proper accommodation due to their mental restrictions. This is particularly of concern where the worker is employed in a safety sensitive position (e.g., log truck driver, swing-stage operator, pilot, electrician, etc.).

The WSIB acknowledges that workplace injuries not only result in physical health issues, but also mental health issues. As of January 2018, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act was amended to allow for workers to make claims regarding chronic mental stress. In 2022, over 2,000 workers filed claims with the WSIB, requesting the need to be off from work because of mental health harms. For employers to properly support these workers to positively and safely return to work, the employer needs to understand the worker's mental health restrictions. Does the worker need to receive instructions in writing, or verbally? Does the worker need to have certain tasks removed from their responsibilities? With an updated FAF, both the WSIB and the employer would be properly informed, helping the worker return to work.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Update the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's Functional Abilities Form, not only addressing physical restrictions, but also mental health restrictions.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

6. Addressing the Challenges of Ontario's Largest Economic Sector: Small Business

This is a sunseting resolution.

Submitted by: Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce, Timmins Chamber of Commerce, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Port Hope and District Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The cumulative regulatory burden, constant legislative changes, and reporting requirements present a disproportionate impact on small businesses and are an obstacle to prosperity, growth and competitiveness.

Background

Businesses throughout the province have repeatedly highlighted the cost of regulatory compliance as a barrier to investment and growth. Business owners have said they find it incredibly difficult to navigate the regulatory framework – especially when that framework is frequently changing due to new and/or updated legislation. When new and/or updated legislation unwittingly introduces hidden costs, the problem is only exacerbated. The Government of Ontario needs to take steps to reduce red tape for small businesses and make it easier for them to understand and comply with regulations.

Recent years have seen significant changes implemented or proposed to WSIB, labour relation, the minimum wage, and pension plans. Businesses saw many changes as a result of Bill 148, the Fair Workplaces, 2017 Better Jobs Act, and the subsequent introduction of Bill 47, the 2018 Making Ontario Open for Business Act, which repealed or rewrote many of Bill 148's changes. Businesses continue to see many changes due to environmental regulations and the federal carbon tax. While regulatory change is not necessarily “bad” – in fact, updating and modernizing regulations should be a priority for all governments – it can have a lasting, negative impact on businesses, if they are implemented haphazardly, or if the government does not make compliance easy. The cost of such changes disproportionately burdens small businesses that often do not have dedicated human resource departments or dedicated personnel to manage the complexities of the requirements.

According to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, Ontario had 439,694 small businesses in December 2021⁴. Statistics Canada defines a small business as one with fewer than 100 employees.⁵ The Ontario government has shown its commitment to broad, structural red tape reduction. The province created the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction to modernize legislation, regulations and policies that can be burdensome, inefficient and inflexible.

The Ontario government recognizes that reducing unnecessary red tape will save businesses time and money and that such reduction is an integral part of growing Ontario's economy. The province has introduced its Less Red Tape, Stronger Ontario Act (Bill 46), which includes 28 legislative, regulatory and policy measures designed to improve competitiveness, strengthen our local supply chains, and make government services easier to access.⁶ We applaud the government's efforts to reduce red tape thus far. However, there is still much work to be done.

The Government of Ontario can ease the regulatory burden by establishing a regulatory concierge service for small businesses in Ontario. A concierge service would be a single-access point for information, support and expertise on regulatory compliance in Ontario. The concierge service would offer one-on-one support to small businesses so that they can successfully navigate regulatory frameworks and achieve compliance with greater ease and so they could devote their limited resources to growing their businesses and the economy.

⁴ <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/sme-research-statistics/en/key-small-business-statistics/key-small-business-statistics-2021>

⁵ <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/1253-small-and-medium-businesses-driving-large-sized-economy>

⁶ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1002504/reducing-red-tape-to-build-a-stronger-ontario>

Such a concierge service is nothing new. The federal government has its Business Benefits Finder, which is a single access point to funding, expertise, facilities, and global opportunities for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seeking to grow through innovation.⁷

Other jurisdictions have understood the benefit of one-stop support for businesses:

- Greater Sudbury's Regional Business Centre
- Hamilton's One-Stop for Business
- The British Columbia Business Registry
- One Stop Business Registration Portals in Wisconsin and Virginia

While certain single-window initiatives in Ontario exist, such as Service Ontario's ONE-Key, these are 'self-serve' initiatives rather than concierge services, and they do not address the regulatory burden that weighs on Ontario's small businesses.

Creating a team of industry experts to guide business owners through regulations in Ontario will make Ontario attractive for investment and allow existing businesses to spend their resources more efficiently.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. create and promote a provincial concierge service to provide single-window, one-on-one, customized access for small businesses to guide them through regulatory compliance processes and help them achieve compliance obligations;
2. develop interconnectivity between municipal, provincial, and federal concierge services to enable knowledge-sharing and to ensure that each is able to provide the best guidance and expertise to its clients; and
3. continue to work with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Ontario's business community, and with small businesses in order to reduce red tape.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

⁷ https://innovation.ised-isde.canada.ca/s/?language=en_CA

7. WSIB Policy and Procedural Changes to Employer Counts and Costs

Submitted by: Tillsonburg District Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Chamber of Commerce Brantford-Brant, Leamington District Chamber of Commerce, London Chamber of Commerce, Woodstock District Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The WSIB recently posted information on their website announcing that effective July 1, 2022, all costs and counts associated with COVID-19-related claims will now be applied in calculating premium rates to individual Schedule 1 employers.

Background

COVID-19 claims with disease dates before June 30, 2022, are allocated on a Schedule wide basis and do not affect the calculation of each individual employer's premium rate. The experience rating change was made from collective or group employer liability to individual employer liability for COVID-19 claims, and this change was made without consultation with employer organizations. The current arbitrary and mandatory change made by the Ontario government and WSIB, effective July 1, 2022, may have significant cost impacts on Ontario Employers with allowed covid claims.

The new WSIB Rate Framework system implemented in January 2020 has significantly changed the duration of the claim cost life cycle for employers. A newly allowed claim now directly affects employers for six years of active claim costs and potentially up to another five or more years until the employer account has reduced all risk bands to the pre-injury levels. An incorrectly or hastily adjudicated decision could now affect an employer for 11+ years. Claim decisions are typically made within one week. Employers who are required by law to fund this system should be able to rely upon adjudication that is not hasty but based upon fair and objective comprehensive evidence. The adjudication of COVID-19 claims on the cost statements of individual employers raises concerns for adjudication and proof of accident.

Other occupational diseases are not experienced-rated on individual employer accounts. It is questionable, and even doubtful, that COVID-19 should be correctly classified as an occupational disease. It is a highly contagious pandemic virus, spread widely in the community without any public health precautions.

COVID-19-related claims should either be deemed a continued collective employer liability or be removed entirely as a compensable condition. The WSIB Claims Appeals and Tribunal process is complicated, costly, time-consuming, and somewhat biased against the employer (especially at the WSIAT).

This recent WSIB policy change now has the potential for a major impact on Schedule 1 employers relating to:

- Lost time claims (especially for long-term COVID-19 cases), NEL permanent disability assessments, and fatality claims have the potential for significant cost impact.
- Annual employer premium rates on individual employer liability vs collective liability, including prolonged claim, costs up to 11+ years due to the WSIB prospective system banding and scaling methodologies.
- A much higher cost burden will be placed on all employers for COVID-19 claims, including many industrial classes outside the high COVID-19 sectors (e.g. healthcare, residential care).
- Because this change can potentially increase costs, Employers might be incentivized to take more steps to mitigate claims. Community transmission is unquestionably dominant. Hazard controls used to minimize claims (continued mandatory masking and mandated vaccines) may negatively affect the hiring and labour market competitiveness.

- The COVID-19 Questionnaire administered by the WSIB to determine causation is inadequate because it depends on the subject beliefs of the person claiming that COVID-19 was acquired at work. No proof is required by PCR tests, which will verify the variant of COVID-19 received. If two people in the same workplace have two different variants of COVID-19, they are unrelated.
- The 2022 number of COVID-19 claims is higher than the previous three years.
- The percentage of Lost Time Claims has increased significantly in Ontario, from 32% to 46% in 2022.
- The adjudication of COVID-19 claims does not specify how or what data will be used by claims managers to determine if the person's employment created a greater risk of contracting COVID-19 to which the public at large is not exposed.
- The adjudication criteria for COVID-19 claims do not ask: do you have children in school? Do you have a spouse who works in a high-risk setting? Are you masking while in public? Has anyone you know been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past two weeks? Have you been out for any public activity in the past two weeks (dinner, theatre, sporting event, grocery shopping)? How often and when do you test yourself for COVID-19 at home (people who are actively trying to avoid acquiring the COVID-19 virus can quickly identify their most high-risk encounters).

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Remove COVID-19 pandemic-related disease compensation from allowable WSIB claims or occupation disease benefits.
 - a. Additionally, in anticipating future pandemics, COVID-19 should not be deemed a compensable condition arising out of, and in the course of employment. It should be treated as the common cold or flu and other similar diseases that are considered global and community-driven, and not workplace issues. (The default is that these are generally not compensable).
2. If recommendation #1 cannot be accommodated, and a WSIB claim is allowed, then the WSIB claim costs should be pooled under employer collective liability, not the individual employer account liability.
3. Amend the WSIB Policy manual to provide a clear test for when COVID-19 claims should be filed and will be allowed, but only if it applies to collective liability.
4. Amend the Workplace Safety Insurance Act (WSIA) to, in addition to limiting year-over-year premium increases, also restrict total claims-related costs shouldered by the employer because of lifetime claims.
5. Make the WSIA and WSIB Policy Manual more user-friendly and transparent to all stakeholders. WSIA Section 15 Occupational Disease needs to identify the worker's claim standard of proof evidence.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee does not support this resolution.

Overall, the resolution proposes employers bear zero responsibility in the instance of COVID-19 being transmitted in the workplace or that the responsibility should be treated as a collective liability of all Schedule 1 businesses (i.e., manufacturing, agriculture, mining, construction, leisure and hospitality, retail, transportation, utilities) rather than the individual employer, leading to higher costs for businesses.

Recommendation #1 proposes employers bear zero responsibility in the instance of COVID-19 being transmitted in the workplace. This is not consistent with the OCC's position on the importance of public health, the role of businesses in fostering a healthy community and workplace, and employer responsibility under the Ontario Occupational Health & Safety Act (OHSA) to ensure a safe workplace.

Furthermore, COVID-19 is not, in every instance, comparable to a common cold or flu. For some individuals, it comes with long term effects and/or disabilities. As such, there are many instances where COVID-19 is comparable to diseases such as asthma and tuberculosis. COVID-19 is a disease that falls under WSIA jurisdiction and does occur in the workplace. The purpose of the WSIA is to provide an insurance regime in regard to workplace illnesses and to preclude workers from suing an employer in regard to any workplace injury that is covered by the WSIA (if the employer is registered with WSIB). As it stands, the resolution suggests employees could sue their employer in regard to COVID-19 that was transmitted in their workplace. This sort of litigation is exactly what the WSIA seeks to avoid.

The pooling criteria under recommendation #2 pits one industry against another, which goes against OCC resolutions guidelines. Risk is not the same across all Schedule 1 businesses. By removing the responsibility from the individual employer and pooling WSIB claim costs under employer collective liability, it will increase business costs and increase administrative burdens for all Schedule 1 businesses that have not incurred a COVID-19 claim.

While there was extensive exchange with the authoring chamber, and some changes were accepted (e.g., adding recommendation #4), overall, the Policy & Advocacy committee and the OCC does not support the resolution as it stands.

8. Align the Province of Ontario's Framework on Carbon Capture and Sequestration with Global Jurisdictions

Submitted by: Sarnia-Lambton Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Guelph Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Industries striving to meet net-zero targets in Ontario are faced with more hurdles than their counterparts in different jurisdictions due to the Government of Ontario's approach to carbon capture and sequestration (CCS), which lacks a clear and efficient regulatory framework. The federal government provides funding that Ontario-based facilities cannot access due to the province's continued delays.

Background

From an investment attraction standpoint, with provincial, national, and international competition for investment dollars and associated projects, the province must be responsive to the needs of industry to develop timely CCS projects in Ontario. Prospective investors linked to the low-carbon economy have indicated to the Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership (SLEP) that they are interested in pursuing large-scale capital investment projects in Ontario similar to what have been announced in Alberta and competing jurisdictions in the United States. However, they have noted that until there is a clear regulatory framework with defined timelines and policies, these investments are not being explored as "top-of-desk" amongst the companies' other projects in their investment portfolio. This would change with timely modifications to the existing Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Act (OGSRA), the Mining Act (e.g., to enable sequestration on crown land), and the permissibility to move forward with projects.

Ontario is losing out on potential investment capital that may not be around in two years to other provinces and territories as well as American states and other global geographies.

Any delay in the removal of barriers and the establishment of a new, supportive, and enabling regulatory framework for CCS has significant negative impacts on economic development linked to the low-carbon and net-zero economies.

From an investment retention and expansion standpoint, the implementation of these recommendations would have a tremendous impact on the short-term and long-term economic competitiveness of large emitters in the province, especially those in Sarnia-Lambton that could capitalize on investments linked to the low-carbon hydrogen industry. Additionally, the ability to utilize CCS technologies to capture carbon dioxide emissions would have a tremendous financial benefit to those businesses currently exposed to the escalating carbon tax, while also assisting the province and Canada in their drive to net-zero.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. State definitive timelines for development of a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework for Ontario CCS projects, targeting completion by the end of 2023, by leveraging industry partners versed on this topic.
2. Work with key industry partners to ensure that Ontario's approach to pore space allocation is strategic and maximizes the most efficient usage of the finite geological storage space available in the region, so that more communities and industry can benefit, and Ontario's climate targets are most efficiently addressed.
3. Develop a comprehensive regulatory framework for full lifecycle CCS project approval, from demonstration/pilot to commercial-scale development.

4. Ensure appropriate flexibility in the regulations for various types of storage applications, an expedited and timely approval process, rigorous pre-screening process for eligible project proponents and an appropriate transfer of long-term responsibilities for stored CO₂ following the Alberta model.⁸
5. Explore further opportunities to permit enhanced oil-and-gas recovery (OGSRA and the Mining Act) to capitalize on the associated geological make-up and extended economic opportunities.
6. Expedite the approval process to ensure the competitiveness of economic development in Ontario, with a goal of all regulations being fully and completely defined prior to the end of 2023.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

⁸ <https://www.alberta.ca/carbon-capture-utilization-and-storage-overview.aspx#:~:text=Captured%20CO2%20is%20injected%20into,capture%2C%20utilization%20and%20storage%20projects.>

9. Attracting and Retaining Highly Skilled Talent

Submitted by: Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by Cambridge Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Expanding access to highly skilled workers and ensuring regions throughout Ontario can retain this talent is essential to the province's economic recovery. Ontario's post-secondary institutions play a critical role in developing a robust workforce and fostering an innovation ecosystem which attracts investment to urban and rural communities.

Background

As businesses and industry across Ontario continue to rebuild and recover, they are looking to address local challenges, such as talent retention and adapting to new ways of working. Ensuring these businesses have access to highly skilled talent who can address these challenges and fuel local workforces throughout Ontario's regions is critical to their success.

Ontario's post-secondary institutions have vital roles to play in developing, attracting and retaining the talent needed throughout the province's communities and regions. For example, due to higher human capital development of post-secondary alumni, post-secondary graduates contributed at least \$50.6 billion to the province's GDP in 2018, according to the Conference Board of Canada. The additional income of post-secondary graduates, equivalent to more than six per cent of Ontario's GDP (Conference Board), enables them to make significant economic contributions to regions across Ontario by supporting local jobs and economies.

Ontario post-secondary institutions are actively supporting local businesses by developing and attracting local talent. This is achieved by providing support for international students seeking to learn and work in Ontario, ensuring the talent post-secondary institutions attract have accessible places to live, as well as supplying modern equipment and facilities to accommodate the research that will fuel Ontario's economic future, while bringing in students and researchers from around the world.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to support post-secondary institutions in contributing to a highly skilled and innovative workforce throughout the province to drive growth and prosperity.

Attracting International Talent to Support Ontario: International talent will play a key role in Ontario's social and economic recovery as students and workers support their local communities by volunteering, and by boosting regional economies through spending activities and filling in-demand jobs across the province.

More than 38 per cent of all international students in Canada are studying in Ontario, according to Statistics Canada. In addition, more than 101,100 international students enrolled at Ontario post-secondary institutions during the 2021-22 academic year, according to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

The Ontario Nominee Program is one initiative that provides a streamlined avenue for those seeking to study and work in Ontario, with additional benefits for institutions, students, local communities, and the province. Nominees provide substantial contributions to local labour markets and the skills they develop in post-secondary institutions help expand Ontario's highly skilled labour force.

However, more can be done to ensure international students, business owners and entrepreneurs can arrive in Ontario and form meaningful connections to the places in which they work, live and learn.

Providing Housing for Students, Staff and Faculty: Ensuring access to housing is critical in attracting high-quality talent to regions throughout Ontario. Providing spaces to live in proximity of places of work and study

enable a range of economic and social benefits as newcomers visit local businesses and engage with their communities.

Over the past 10 years, enrolment in Ontario's post-secondary institutions has increased significantly from roughly 456,000 full-time-equivalents in the 2012-13 year to more than 539,000 in 2021-22. In order to support these students, as well as the staff and faculty who facilitate their education, it is critical that adequate housing is provided. While it cannot address these issues alone, post-secondary housing is one tool among many necessary to provide adequate space for students to live.

Building housing comes with several challenges – especially for post-secondary institutions which are not funded as housing providers and operate within limited space. The regulatory mechanisms in place to manage development are often costly, restrictive and impede the ability of institutions to adequately provide necessary housing arrangements. This results in increased pressure on local housing supplies as student housing demand grows into the wider market.

The government of Ontario has an opportunity to assist by working with post-secondary institutions to reduce regulatory barriers associated with the development of housing on and near post-secondary campuses, with benefits for students, institutions and local communities.

Ensuring Access to Modern Infrastructure for Ontario's Talent: Access to high-quality learning environments and modern facilities for individuals to learn and work is critical in attracting talent and fostering Ontario's position as a thriving, attractive market for investment.

These assets also provide direct benefits to local economies, as many small businesses and community members can access innovative facilities where they can test ideas and scale operations, providing communities and local industry with necessary resources to grow.

Ensuring post-secondary institutions have the tools to build, maintain, retrofit and modernize their infrastructure will help surrounding communities and regions attract talent, while creating jobs in construction, maintenance and more, fueling local workforce and associated supply chains.

Avenues to secure funding for post-secondary infrastructure, such as through the Facilities Renewal Program and the Ontario Research Fund help ensure talent can learn in modern classrooms that will prepare them for in-demand jobs, while working in facilities where they can make discoveries that push the boundaries of knowledge and ultimately improve quality of life.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Double student nomination allocations to expand opportunities for international students and help address local labour needs.
2. Work with post-secondary institutions to reduce regulatory barriers hindering the construction of new post-secondary housing, on and off campus.
3. Match federal investments in post-secondary infrastructure projects, particularly research infrastructure through the Ontario Research Fund – Research Infrastructure stream, to facilitate research that drives innovation in the Ontario economy.
4. Increase funding allocations to post-secondary institutions for Facilities Renewal Program-eligible projects to maintain and modernize post-secondary infrastructure projects, including retrofits for existing buildings and addressing the backlog of deferred maintenance.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

10. Building Rural Transportation and Transit Infrastructure

Submitted by: Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Employers in rural areas of Ontario are increasingly dependent on adequate transportation systems for sustaining workforce requirements.

Background

As labour and skills demands are increasingly challenging for Ontario employers, reliable transportation options for employees are critical across all sectors.

Ontario's Minister of Transportation Caroline Mulroney noted in *Connecting the Southwest: A Draft Transportation Plan for Southwestern Ontario* (January 2020) that people need services that work for them, most notably a safe and reliable system that connects smaller communities to larger centres, which improves access to jobs, and supports an open and competitive business environment. The report further states that employees need to be able to access jobs where they are available, whether they are in the agricultural sector, financial centres, automotive plants, schools or hospitals.

A 94.1 FM in St. Thomas report on January 20, 2023, noted that local Mayor Joe Preston planned a meeting with Ministry of Transportation officials at the upcoming Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) conference to discuss regional transit options. Preston emphasized that connecting St. Thomas to London with convenient transit was vital for growth and enhanced connectivity will improve the movement of people, goods and services. His municipality would be requesting increased funding which is urgently required through the imminent opening of an Amazon facility near Talbotville and the Maple Leaf Foods processing plant in south London.

The London Free Press further noted on January 17, 2023, that a transit system linking St. Thomas and London would offer a more convenient and accessible option for students travelling to and from Fanshawe College and Western University. Mayor Preston indicated his city would operate the transit system dependent upon financial support from the provincial government. An hourly bus is planned from downtown St. Thomas to south London.

A November 29, 2022, report in The Brantford Expositor indicated that Brant County and Brantford are drafting a regional transportation plan. Brant Mayor David Bailey noted that bus service is desired to link communities in his municipality with Brantford, Woodstock and Cambridge.

Currently, Brant Transit offers a shared ride service within the county and into Brantford. Riders are required to book in advance. Ride Norfolk, a project funded by the provincial government, operates daily weekday service between Brantford and Simcoe along with other communities including Port Dover, Delhi, Tillsonburg and Turkey Point.

In Perth County, PC Connect operates five routes with services into London and Waterloo Region. The system was launched in November 2020 with funding from the Ontario Community Transportation Grant Program. The objective is moving passengers from Perth County into larger urban centres where connections are established with local transit systems.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Increase funding for inter-municipal transit services to assist employers in responding to escalating workforce demands.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

11. Changes to Alcohol Retail in Ontario Need to Support Local Industry and Jobs in the Wine and Grape Sector

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: The Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by the Amherstburg Chamber of Commerce, Leamington Chamber of Commerce, Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce

Issue

As the Ontario government considers new retail for wine in the province, it is essential that the government uses this opportunity to ensure Ontario grape growers and wineries can grow their businesses, contribute to provincial and regional economies, and create local jobs. Key to ensuring the future growth of the Ontario grape and wine sector is:

- Eliminating the 35% import tax currently imposed on local Ontario wineries;
- Eliminating the 6.1% retail store tax on domestically produced wine; and,
- Not trading the current retail monopoly for a grocery-led oligopoly.

Background

In 2015, the Ontario wine and grape industry contributed \$4.4 billion to the Ontario economy, supported 18,000 jobs, and hundreds of small family-owned businesses accounted and attracted over 2.4 million tourists to wine country every year.⁹ This accounted for nearly half of Canada's wine and grape industry. An average bottle of Ontario wine sold generates \$29.69 of business revenue, \$5.23 of tax revenue and \$8.71 of wages. For every \$1.00 spent on Canadian wine in Ontario, \$3.95 in GDP is generated across the province.

In 2015, there were approximately 456 grape growers operating in Ontario with a combined acreage of 18,383 grape-bearing acres. There were also approximately 180 wineries in Ontario that sold over 8.3 million nine litre equivalent cases of wine. Total winery revenue representing wine sales, wine kit sales and non-wine revenue such as merchandise, events, etc. was \$562.9 million.

The wine and grape industry is a key economic driver in Ontario but is especially important to the Niagara, Lake Erie North Shore and Prince Edward County areas. Windsor-Essex County alone has 17 wineries due to its unique maritime climate which allows it to have longer sun hours and greater heat units than any other area in Canada. This unique climate contributes to the production of award-winning wines created from the finest locally grown vinifera and French hybrid wine grapes.¹⁰

Ontario is already one of the most open wine jurisdictions in the world. At the LCBO, Ontario wines hold only a 24 percent market share. Other wine producing nations around the world dominate their own market. Spain, South Africa, Argentina and Chile each own over 90% of their domestic market. Italy owns over 80%, Australia over 75%, the USA over 60% and even Russia is at 50% ownership of their own market. Major wine producing countries such as Spain, Italy, France, America and Australia provide hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies, particularly for marketing abroad. These subsidies are often directed by the foreign wineries at maintaining and growing market share in Canada and Ontario.

⁹ <https://wgaoc.ca/economic-impact/>

¹⁰ <https://www.epicwineries.com/wineries/>

Alongside limited market share, Ontario wineries pay the 35% import tax that is also levied against foreign wineries. The elimination of this tax would allow Ontario wineries and grape growers to create more jobs in rural Ontario, maintain protection of the Greenbelt, and continuously invest in the Ontario economy.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Eliminate the Import Tax on Domestic Wines: Ontario wineries currently pay a 35% import tax through the LCBO markup structure. Ontario wineries are seeking a 35% permanent tax credit that is predictable.
2. Eliminate the Alcohol Manufacturer Retail Store Tax. No other Ontario business has a tax (6.1% for wine, 61% for spirits) on top of the other sales taxes the government collects.
3. Prevent private oligopolies from rising: Ensure market is accessible to retailers of all sizes, including independent licenses for specialty wine shops i.e., a license enabling independent stores with no chains or ability to consolidate.
4. Work with other provinces to enable Ontario wineries to better serve their customers. Enable cross-border shipping so Ontario wineries can ship purchased products to customer's homes in provinces including Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

12. Diversifying healthcare to ease the burden on Emergency Rooms and family doctors

Submitted by: Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce, Belleville Chamber of Commerce, Guelph Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Our hospitals are in crisis, struggling to fulfill all the healthcare needs we are asking of them. At the same time, many people in Ontario are without access to a family doctor. Lack of access to healthcare is leading to greater lost time and limiting workforce mobility. While our hospital and family physician services are in need of investment, there are other healthcare professionals in our communities that are underutilized and can help fill in the gaps when it comes to primary and non-urgent healthcare needs.

Background

Healthcare in Ontario is crisis. Hospitals are regularly at capacity for dealing with emergencies and staffing struggles have led to regular temporary closures to new admittance.

While COVID-19 and a particularly difficult influenza season have created challenges, adding further pressure is the lack of family physicians. According to the Ontario College of Family Physicians, more than 3 million Ontarians could be without a family doctor by 2025.

People without a family doctor are left to piece together their healthcare services with what is available to them, including attending Emergency Rooms for non-urgent healthcare needs.

Increasing the service capacity of hospitals and access to family doctors should be a priority for the government, but there are other healthcare services that can help take some of the pressure off in the near term.

Nurse Practitioners can shoulder some of the demand for family doctors through funding more Nurse Practitioner-led clinics as a primary care option, as well as funding the additional Nurse Practitioner seats at Ontario's universities.

Similarly, pharmacists have the expertise to ease some of the healthcare burden by increasing their ability to prescribe and administer medication. Steps have recently been taken to expand this capacity, but more can be done.

Community Health Centres are able to provide physical and mental healthcare to some of our most vulnerable citizens. There are still many communities around Ontario that do not have this service, which serve individuals who live with complex mental health and/or addictions, extreme poverty, and disability. It is welcoming to newcomers, racialized individuals, Indigenous persons, and individuals who identify as 2SLGBTQ+. The need for Community Health Centres is especially important for businesses located in historic downtowns who are dealing with the consequences and filling in some of the gaps for marginalized individuals.

Enhancing funding for Community Paramedicine Programs will assist communities with an additional safety net that will meet people's healthcare needs without a visit to the hospital.

We need our government to work with local healthcare providers to ensure people have access to walk-in clinics. This is a vital stopgap for people unable to access a family doctor, but in need of non-emergency healthcare — yet many communities are un- or underserved. Enhancing access to walk-in clinics is a necessary preventative measure that will ensure the treatment of various ailments that may otherwise be escalated and lead to readmittance, putting further pressure on an already strained healthcare infrastructure.

Mobile clinics offer resources to rural communities that are often without significant local healthcare services.

Employers in Ontario are facing significant challenges attracting and retaining their workforce. Providing adequate and efficient healthcare will minimize absenteeism and creating a stronger, healthier workforce.

Workers are reluctant to relocate due to the potential loss of access to a family doctor, limiting workforce mobility in Ontario.

Healthcare challenges increase in rural communities, adding more barriers to attracting skilled workers — particularly for our struggling tourism sector.

A healthy workforce will drive a healthy economy.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Provide more funding for Nurse Practitioner-led clinics, and fund additional Nurse Practitioner seats at Ontario's universities.
2. Expand funding for community paramedicine programs.
3. Support Community Health Centres as a means of addressing healthcare needs for those with barriers and needs that fall outside the scope of traditional healthcare systems.
4. Ensure communities have access to walk-in clinics.
5. Invest in mobile clinics to meet non-urgent healthcare needs in rural communities.
6. Make medical schools more financially accessible to students interested in entering the medical field.
7. Work with the federal government to Improve the mobility of physicians within Canada by broadening the national licensure program.
8. Continue to improve recognition of equivalent qualifications held by international medical graduates to integrate them into the Canadian medical field and meet fast-growing demand.
9. Increase admission capacity for different types of health care professionals,
10. Expand programs to offer incentives for health care professionals — including physicians, nurses, specialists, and technicians — to locate in rural and northern regions experiencing higher levels of healthcare workforce shortages.
11. Ensure that communities across Canada possess the digital infrastructure necessary for enhanced and integrated telehealth programs that bring physician teams and patients closer together.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

13. Empower the development of housing in Ontario

Submitted by: Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: London Chamber of Commerce, Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, and Lincoln Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The lack of attainable housing in Ontario has reached crisis levels, and the cost of housing continues to grow far in excess of inflation. The 2022 Ontario Economic Report identified this cost as a major pressure point for the economy and businesses. The *More Homes Built Faster Act (2022)* will assist in speeding up the pace of development and shows the Government of Ontario's willingness to tackle this issue and make tough decisions to solve the housing crisis. However, this issue has been decades in the making, and solving it will be an ongoing and evolving process for many years to come.

Background

A 2021 Scotiabank report showed that Ontario had the greatest insufficiency of housing stock out of all Canadian provinces and would have to build 650,000 new units in order to meet the Canadian average. That average is itself at the bottom of the G7.¹ There is no permanent solution to Ontario's housing shortage and rising house prices that does not include a massive increase in available housing stock.

The housing shortage has a notable impact on Ontario's economy and its employers. Individuals make their choices on where to live and work based on a trade-off between wages, house prices, and commuting costs.¹¹ With commuting costs rising with energy, and vehicle prices, transit fares, and house prices and rents increasing, employers must either accept a smaller and shrinking pool of talent (especially with the current low unemployment rate) or be forced to increase their wages and labour costs.

As-of-right building of up to three units as now granted in the Act is an excellent tool to counteract the effect of "NIMBYism" on municipal governments, who may be tempted to give in to alarmist concerns of local residents regarding housing density. However, this should be seen as the start of a process. Building more housing without infringing on agricultural and employment lands necessitates increased density, and the Government of Ontario has an opportunity to lay out a framework for future development by introducing plans and a timeline to further expand the building envelope for denser development.

Removing development charges on attainable developments is a positive policy step towards incentivizing this type of construction. However, there are concerns from municipal governments that this shortfall in revenue will result in an increase in property taxes, sometimes substantially. A third of GTA municipalities recently surveyed by the CBC said they planned to raise property taxes as a direct result of this policy, in one instance by 100%.¹² This will have the effect of transferring development costs onto existing residents and businesses at a time of rising expenses for both.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) has raised concerns that these charge waivers may slow the pace of development in the long-term.¹³ If development charges cannot be assessed on a cost-recovery basis but must come entirely out of a fixed budget, it is entirely possible that that budget may be exhausted

¹¹ Kim So, Peter Orazem, Daniel Otto: *The Effects of Housing Prices, Wages, and Commuting Time on Joint Residential and Job Location Choices*. American Journal of Agricultural Economics 83(4).

¹² "Property tax hikes loom in wake of provincial housing rule changes, GTA municipalities warn." CBC News, January 9, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/development-charge-property-tax-survey-1.6706263> on January 11, 2023.

¹³ "Unpacking Bill 23 – More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022." Association of Municipalities of Ontario, November 2, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.amo.on.ca/advocacy/health-human-services/unpacking-bill-23-more-homes-built-faster-act-2022> on January 11, 2023.

while developers are still attempting to build. This could ultimately reduce the total amount of construction in a given fiscal year.

This problem is particularly acute when governments are seeking to increase the rate of construction, meaning that previous permit issuances may no longer be an accurate forecast of future construction, and municipal governments are at increased risk of mis-estimating future growth. The Government of Ontario has an opportunity to dispel uncertainty in municipal budgeting by clarifying its plans to compensate municipalities so that these costs can be borne from the much wider array of financial tools and revenue sources available to the province.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Introduce plans and a policy framework for the implementation of an increase of the building envelope and a timeline to expand inclusionary zoning, as-of-right building for more units, and greater densification in urban residential areas, while also ensuring investments are made in infrastructure and services that support densification.
2. Clarify their intent in regard to addressing the loss of municipal revenue from development charges and set a fiscal policy to address this impact and ensure the loss of this revenue will not result in any slowdown of construction.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

14. Establish a Business Energy Audit Program

This is a sunseting resolution.

Submitted by: Mississauga Board of Trade

Issue

When the Ontario Government ended the Cap & Trade system, it cancelled several energy conservation programs that were funded through this tax. The business Energy Audit program was one of those casualties. However, the program was very successful and encouraged businesses to perform an energy audit and use the findings to implement energy conservation programs.

Background

The Ontario Government has stated that it intends to help Canada meet the Paris 2030 Greenhouse Gas emission (GHG) reduction targets through programs that will help residents and businesses reduce their GHG emissions.

In order to develop a successful plan for GHG emission reduction, a business needs an energy audit performed by a qualified contractor in order to use the findings to implement an energy conservation plan.

In the past, the Government has funded up to 50% of the cost of an energy audit as an incentive to get businesses to retain a consultant and complete the audit.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Establish an Energy Audit program for businesses and fund up to 50% of the cost of the audit to a business through a grant.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

15. Extend exemptions for the Non-Resident Speculation Tax

Submitted by: Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce, Timmins Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Businesses in Ontario that need to hire foreign talent to fill specific roles face even greater challenges with the Non-Resident Speculation Tax, which is an additional tax placed on foreign nationals and foreign corporations purchasing a home in the province. While there are exceptions for the tax, it needs to be reconsidered in its entirety.

Background

The Non-Resident Speculation Tax (NRST) is applied to the purchase or acquisition of an interest in residential property location anywhere in Ontario by individuals who are foreign nationals or by foreign corporations or taxable trustees.¹⁴ Implemented in 2017 under the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government, it was intended to quell the trend of foreign speculators looking to turn a quick profit.

Originally, the NRST applied to properties purchased in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region at a rate of 15%. However, as part of the More Homes for Everyone Act, the NRST was expanded provincewide in March 2022 and the rate was increased to 20 per cent. Then, on October 24, 2022, the Province raised the tax to 25 per cent.¹⁵

The Minister of Finance told Ontarians in March 2022 that the province was adopting “the most comprehensive Non-Resident Speculation Tax in the country,” because young families, seniors and workers are desperate for housing that meet their needs. However, a lack of housing supply and rising costs have put the dream of home ownership out of reach for many families.

While it is understandable that the NRST is meant to discourage foreign speculation, the Ministry of Finance has failed to see the extenuating impact its expansion to the rest of the province, particularly Northern and rural Ontario, has had on a company’s ability to attract skilled foreign workers.

Attracting labour is already a significant provincial issue for many businesses, but it is even more difficult for those businesses in Northern and rural Ontario. The shortage of skilled workers is well documented. It has been historically difficult for companies in northern and rural communities to find strong Canadian or foreign national candidates for a wide variety of positions. While most companies prefer to hire Canadian candidates whenever possible, they are sometimes left with no other option than to hire international talent.

For example, a prominent employer in Greater Sudbury said it is experiencing its own issues with the NRST, stating the tax will have ongoing and serious implications on the company’s ability to attract international applicants with specialized skills in the mining industry. Exacerbating the situation is the long processing time for immigration and permanent residency.

That company is adamant the NRST will deter candidates from accepting offers of employment in Northern Ontario communities. This mining company states there is an overall demographic problem that exists in Canadian mining today whereby the mining industry continues its aggressive expansion, resulting in fierce competition between large and small organizations for experienced professionals. This means that any potential candidates have multiple career options at their disposal. Despite the company’s best efforts, extensive

¹⁴ <https://www.ontario.ca/document/land-transfer-tax/non-resident-speculation-tax#section-6:~:text=the%20Act%20applies,-Exemptions%20from%20the%20NRST,-An%20exemption%20from>

¹⁵ https://www.pentictonherald.ca/spare_news/article_b93c99de-f0a8-596d-b2ed-27d8a30ed417.html

recruitment efforts do not always result in sufficiently strong Canadian or Permanent Resident candidates to fill important mining roles.

There are few exemptions to this tax. The Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) affords an exemption to all foreign applicants seeking gainful employment in Ontario. The province also offers exemptions if the foreign national has refugee status or is purchasing property with a Canadian spouse.¹⁶

Five communities in Northern Ontario have been successful in working with the federal government to implement the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP), which allows eligible employers to make full-time, permanent job offers to skilled foreign workers who can help fill identified labour shortages in the community.¹⁷ Successful RNIP candidates are also fast-tracked for permanent residency. Purchasing a home without the added burden of the NRST will support retention in these communities. Since 2020, these five communities have recruited hundreds of skilled workers, who bring their family members with them. These new immigrants are not provided the same exemption as foreign nationals under the OINP.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. immediately expand the exemption to the NRST to include participants in the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, as well as those awaiting permanent resident status (eg: Afghan Initiative and Ukrainian Initiative arrivals) and post-graduation work permit holders living in Ontario communities.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

¹⁶ <https://www.ontario.ca/document/land-transfer-tax/non-resident-speculation-tax#section-6:~:text=the%20Act%20applies.-,Exemptions%20from%20the%20NRST,-An%20exemption%20from>

¹⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/rural-northern-immigration-pilot/pr-eligibility.html>

16. Fostering Electric Vehicle Success in Ontario

Submitted by: Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by the Woodstock Chamber of Commerce and Leamington Chamber of Commerce

Issue

As countries continue to grapple with the global climate crisis and gas prices have set all-time record highs, more and more people are turning to electric vehicles (EVs) as part of the solution. At the same time, the Government of Canada is pushing to eliminate the sale of gas-powered passenger vehicles by 2035. Canada and Ontario possess everything necessary to develop the world's most Environmental Social Governance (ESG) friendly electric vehicles, batteries, and components. Key in unlocking that potential will be a strong EV market that promotes growth in the sector. Now is the time to put in place the necessary support to help build that market. Ontario must maintain momentum with recent historic investments. The province cannot fall behind other jurisdictions in Canada or the United States and must develop a comprehensive plan including infrastructure to foster EV growth in the province.

Background

The reason many are so enticed to transition over to EVs is because they are seen as the future of the auto sector. It is not enough for Ontario to adopt the advancements that come from EVs and their development. Rather, it needs to lead the charge from developing new technologies and innovations to commercializing and integrating these exciting new technologies into the marketplace. Ontario has the opportunity, resources, and technology to develop into a hub for research, innovation, and development for the auto sector in its transition to EVs. A comprehensive strategy is needed for research and development to attract additional investors and partners to bolster the growth of Ontario's EV sector from the mining stage to the manufacturing stage. This strategy will need support from industrial partners, Ontario's colleges and universities, and labour groups involved in the sector. Canada has the potential to be the leading source of the most ESG batteries and raw source materials in the world. Canada has a strong record of promoting ESG resource extraction in the world, which needs to be used to develop the Canadian and Ontario mining sector that is essential to produce the batteries needed to fuel the EV revolution. There is no place with more potential to provide raw materials than Ontario, with the mining potential located in the north and the Ring of Fire. Ontario is well positioned to solidify its position as an internationally recognized leader in developing the mining of raw materials that will support the production of ESG batteries and other EV components. However, a coordinated strategy and plan that will align this opportunity with the needs of industry will be critical to ensure Ontario's ongoing success and leadership in the automotive sector.

The most significant hinderance to consumer adoption of EV's is the upfront cost. Consumers can save thousands of dollars over the long-run with powering EVs versus traditional internal combustion engines, but the initial sticker shock for many turns them away. Many other jurisdictions across North America and the globe have recognized this barrier to adoption and have put in place programs to incentivize consumers to make the switch to EVs. Whether done to reduce greenhouse gases, improve local air quality, or just to be innovative, the lack of any financial motive to convince consumers to migrate to EVs leaves Ontario lagging behind our continental and global competitors.

Across Canada, consumers qualify for a rebate of up to \$5,000 on zero-emissions vehicles, or a rebate up to \$2,500 for plug-in hybrid vehicles.¹⁸ However, unlike other provinces, Ontario lacks any provincial

¹⁸ Transport Canada, "Incentives for Purchasing Zero-Emission Vehicles," Transport Canada (/ Gouvernement du Canada, November 22, 2022), last modified November 22, 2022, accessed September 26, 2023, <https://tc.canada.ca/en/road-transportation/innovative-technologies/zero-emission-vehicles/light-duty-zero-emission-vehicles/incentives-purchasing-zero-emission-vehicles>.

compensation for consumers to make the switch. Ranging from \$2,500¹⁹ in Newfoundland and Labrador to \$7,000²⁰ in Quebec, other provinces are developing programs to encourage consumers to embrace innovation in an industry that is essential to Ontario's economy. Ontario had been the leader in EV subsidization previously offering up to \$14,000 in rebates for consumers choosing electric until the program was cancelled in 2018.²¹ Now is the time to consider re-introducing some form of rebate to incentivize the transition from gas-powered, internal combustion vehicles to EV vehicles. An EV incentive could be a simple method to encourage consumers to adopt EVs and make Ontario a stronger market for additional EV investment.

Any potential incentive program needs to be inclusive of businesses so that they can move their fleets away from traditional gas-powered, internal combustion vehicles. Businesses know that EVs are the future of the auto sector and want to take advantage of their low cost of fueling as well as their environmental benefits. But businesses have to evaluate and make decisions based on return-of-investment. Thus, any subsidy scheme needs to go beyond the personal consumer and be inclusive of businesses and their transition into EVs.

The other major component from the consumer end that has limited the growth of the EV market is "range anxiety." The current EV models have larger travel ranges than ever before, with some exceeding the range offered by full tanks of gas. However, the convenience of a five-minute fill-up is hard to move away from, and without the necessary infrastructure it becomes impossible to compete.

To support the consumer and commercial adoption of EVs, the Government of Ontario needs to develop a comprehensive EV infrastructure plan that will enable a strong EV sector and market. The infrastructure that will be needed to support the increasing consumer and commercial adoption will be crucial to meet the growing demand for EV's. Level 1 chargers that connect straight to a standard 120-volt home outlet can take hours to fully charge an EV. Slow charging can be very challenging for those who routinely work on the road or have long commutes.²² Therefore, many EV owners choose to invest in a level 2 charger. Many of the same jurisdictions that are providing consumers with subsidies to convert also provide subsidies for level 2 chargers. For example, the Province of New Brunswick provides those who receive the provincial electric vehicle rebate, an additional rebate of up to \$750 to offset the cost of the purchase and installation of a level 2 charger.²³ If the province is going to foster a strong EV sector then it needs to provide consumers, both personal and commercial, the means to reduce range anxiety while ensuring they have the full use of their vehicles.

The province also needs to start moving beyond personal home chargers in the garages of suburban communities and limited charging spots at commercial outlets. Any comprehensive plan must include the following elements for EV infrastructure:

- Increasing access to EV Chargers in rural and remote areas of the province, including in provincial parks, recreation areas, and along vital transportation arteries.
- Expanding access to EV Chargers in municipally owned parking facilities as well as on-street public parking in downtown cores, and other business areas.
- Implementing a strategy to ensure that residents in older neighbourhoods with a lack of private parking have access to public charging stations with on-street parking.

¹⁹ "Electric Vehicle Rebate Program - Newfoundland & Labrador Hydro," accessed January 13, 2023, <https://nlhydro.com/electric-vehicles/ev-rebate/>.

²⁰ "New Electric Vehicle Rebate | vehiculeselectriques.gouv.qc.ca," accessed January 13, 2023, <https://vehiculeselectriques.gouv.qc.ca/english/rabais/ve-neuf/programme-rabais-vehicule-neuf.asp>.

²¹ "Ontario Cancels EV Rebate Program, Wants to Lower Gas Prices Instead," accessed December 22, 2022, <https://www.guideautoweb.com/en/articles/47389/ontario-cancels-ev-rebate-program-wants-to-lower-gas-prices-instead/#:~:text=Ontario%20Cancels%20EV%20Rebate%20Program%2C%20Wants%20to%20Lower%20gas%20prices%20down%20by%2010%20cents%20a%20litre>.

²² "What Are The Different Levels Of Electric Vehicle Charging? - Forbes," accessed January 4, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/wheels/advice/ev-charging-levels/>.

²³ "Electric Vehicle Incentive Program Announced," accessed December 15, 2023, https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2021.07.0522.html.

- Develop guidelines around multi-unit residential buildings so that residents can have access to adequate charging infrastructure for EVs and have a framework for installing and operating chargers.

Furthermore, there needs to be a plan so that businesses can adequately transition their workplaces to supporting EVs and adopting EVs as part of their standard fleet of commercial vehicles. Businesses must be part of the movement towards EVs for any market to develop and the sector to be strong in the province.

Ontario's competitors are not waiting for the province to make the first move. The United States (US) has developed the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program (NEVI) that commits \$5 Billion over five years to fund the strategic development of EV Infrastructure.²⁴ Under this plan, many US states are receiving funding to push forward with infrastructure development that will foster and enhance the adoption towards EVs within their state. For example, the state of Michigan will receive approximately \$110 million over the five years of the program.²⁵ Ontario cannot afford to sit by and let regional competitors take the lead on EV infrastructure.

The physical infrastructure needs to be combined with human capital necessary to be a leader in the sector. This means working with post-secondary institutions to lead technological development that maintains and attracts high quality personnel in Ontario to further the field of research. Additionally developing the training and skill sets needed by Ontario's workforce to further the transition towards EVs with the ability to grow to meet increased demand for skilled workers. Without the skilled and trained workforce, investment in the sector will look elsewhere.

If Ontario is going to attract investment in the EV sector, the province must show that it is committed to the furtherance of EV technology. The Government of Ontario needs to show a commitment to making EVs work everywhere in the province with accessibility for all consumers including businesses. If other jurisdictions including regional competitors in the United States are seen as leaders over Ontario, then we risk losing out on further EV investment opportunities and partnerships that could bring thousands of jobs to the province.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Introduce a rebate program comparable to other Canadian jurisdictions to subsidize the cost of transitioning consumers, both for individuals and businesses, from traditional gas-powered vehicles to Electric Vehicles.
2. Develop a comprehensive plan around Electric Vehicle infrastructure that is inclusive of rural, remote, and core urban areas.
3. Develop a plan to help address the needs of businesses to adapt to the growing use of EVs so that their employees, consumers, and operational fleets have access to the necessary infrastructure to make a smooth transition away from traditional gas-powered vehicles.
4. Develop a comprehensive strategy to bolster research and develop talent through Ontario's colleges and universities as well as workplace training programs to develop the workforce needed to foster growth in the EV sector.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

²⁴ "National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program Bipartisan Infrastructure Law," accessed December 22, 2022, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/alternative_fuel_corridors/nominations/90d_nevi_formula_program_guidance.pdf.

²⁵ "National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program," accessed January 5, 2023, <https://www.michigan.gov/egle/about/organization/materials-management/energy/transportation/nevi>.

17. Healthcare Crisis: Demands Exceed Supply

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Brampton Board of Trade

Issue

Ontario's healthcare system is breaking under the compounded pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

Hospital overcrowding has become the new normal in too many of Ontario's cities, including Brampton. This is an historic trend but has been made considerably worse by the many pressures that the COVID-19 pandemic put on emergency departments and surgical waitlists.

The issue is simply one of capacity. The supply of 33,000 hospital beds in Ontario has negligibly increased since 1999²⁶, even though Ontario's population has grown by more than 27%, from 11.5 million to just over 15 million. In addition, the segment of Ontario's population that is 65 years or older has increased by 1 million. As a result, hospitals in high growth cities operate at near or over 100% capacity on a near daily basis. Additionally, a shortage of trained professionals such as nurses is a significant barrier to the healthcare system meeting its full potential.

Another significant factor is that approximately 1 in 6 hospital beds are occupied by patients who require a more 'appropriate level of care' (ALC), which on average is less expensive than hospital beds and come in such forms as long-term care, assisted living, and rehab. Although some progress has been made on ALC via Bill 7, it remains a significant structural issue in our healthcare system. The majority of ALC patients are waiting for a long-term care beds, which in 2019 had a wait list of 161 days. While the current provincial government has invested in more long-term care beds, it takes three years to get those beds in operation. Just 21 new long-term care beds opened in Ontario in 2019, while the waitlist grew by more than 2,000. Under the previous provincial government, only 611 new long-term care beds opened from 2011 to 2018.

Matching patient needs to the appropriate healthcare resources will reduce the strain put on hospitals and will contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Ensure provincial funding commitment for new hospital beds based on communities' and regions' demographic and infrastructure needs.
2. Speed up the process to get new long-term care beds into operation - and make sure the beds are created where they are needed.
3. Ensure provincial funding commitment for variety of 'alternative level of care' options that meet diversity of needs, including at-home, community, and mental health support.
4. Continue seeking solutions to the healthcare staffing crisis, including by looking at ways to continue to expedite credential recognition for internationally trained nurses and those accredited in other provinces.
5. Research healthcare technology in comparable jurisdictions where remote patient monitoring and crisis management is used effectively to curtail hospital stays.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

²⁶<https://www.oha.com/Bulletins/OHA%20Fact%20Sheet%20on%20Hospital%20Capacity%20and%20Projections%20Jan%202015%202021.pdf>

18. Ignite the development of the Ring of Fire

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce, Timmins Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The Ring of Fire is a transformative project for Canada. Provincial action is required to expedite the development of the Ring of Fire and ensure the economic and social potential of this multi-generational project is realized.

Background

The Ring of Fire is a mineral-resource-rich area in the James Bay Lowlands region of Northern Ontario. Located on approximately 5,000 square kilometres of land, significant deposits of critical minerals like copper, zinc, nickel, platinum, palladium, vanadium, and gold, along with the first and largest deposit of chromite in North America, have been discovered since the early 2000s. Based on current projections, the Ring of Fire is estimated to hold more than \$117 billion in geological riches with deposits being significant enough to sustain activity for a century.

The Ring of Fire is certainly significant to Northern Ontario, but it should be a priority for the whole province, as it will have far-reaching impacts across the entire country. The critical minerals found within the Ring of Fire will help create unprecedented economic prosperity across the Far North.

The Ring of Fire holds billions of dollars' worth of high-quality chromite, an essential metal in stainless steel production, demand for which is expected to increase in the years to come. China, the largest importer of chromite, accounting for 60 percent of global demand, has already demonstrated significant interest in the Ring of Fire.

In March 2022, Australian-based Wyloo Metals purchased Noront Resources' mineral assets in the Ring of Fire in a \$616.9-million deal. Now called Ring of Fire Metals, the company owns the rights to the high-grade Eagle's Nest deposit, which contains nickel, copper, platinum and palladium deposits.

Ring of Fire Metals is in discussions with the United States government about possible funding for its project.²⁷ The U.S.'s Department of Defence said it is willing to help fund feasibility studies for early-stage mining companies in North America with promising projects that could help alleviate shortages in some critical minerals.

As the world continues to develop more sophisticated technology, the need for these critical minerals will only escalate. In the first 10 years of the Ring of Fire production, all levels of government stand to increase their tax revenues by nearly \$2 billion, with the provincial government projected to accrue between \$870 to \$940 million. In the long term, the provincial government is expected to receive \$2.89 billion to \$3.25 billion in taxes from the Ring of Fire. Long-term benefits to Ontario's GDP have been forecasted to range between \$16.8 billion and \$27 billion.

The Ring of Fire is also estimated to sustain over 5,500 full-time equivalent jobs annually within its first 10 years, along with significant GDP increases and economic activity in multiple sectors. Benefits will impact the

²⁷ <https://republicofmining.com/2022/11/15/u-s-government-considering-funding-for-ontarios-ring-of-fire-by-naill-mcgee-globe-and-mail-november-15-2022>

mining and mining supply sectors, but will also generate economic opportunities within the manufacturing, construction, utilities, wholesale/retail, trade, and financial services sectors, among others.

While there is still a long way to go before any mining can actually take place in the region, there has been some progress, and there have been several key milestones reached within the development.

Revenue sharing agreements and equitable partnerships with Indigenous communities in the region will be critical to ensuring the Ring of Fire generates benefits for Indigenous procurement, employment, and economic development.

In April 2022, the chiefs from Webequie and Marten Falls First Nations submitted terms of reference for an environmental assessment for the Northern Road Link project, the third and final road necessary to complete the all-season connection to the province's highway system. These two First Nations are co-leading the planning of the Northern Road Link project, with Ontario committing close to \$1 billion to support critical legacy infrastructure, such as the planning and construction of an all-season road network, as well as investments in high-speed internet and road upgrades.

Connecting the mineral-rich opportunities in the Ring of Fire with manufacturing sectors in the rest of the province would help the province become a leading producer across North America of the critical minerals needed for electric vehicles and a clean economy.²⁸

Premier Doug Ford said the Province will continue to work with Indigenous communities towards the development of the Ring of Fire. Ford says the minerals extracted from the Ring of Fire will make the province a “resource powerhouse,” allowing Ontario to become a leader in electric vehicle production in North America.²⁹

For example, a joint venture between LG Energy Solution Ltd. (LGES) and Stellantis N.V. will invest more than \$5 billion to build a facility in Windsor, Ont., to manufacture batteries for EVs in Canada, representing the largest automotive manufacturing investment in the history of the province. Such green technology requires significant amounts of rarer metals, and Canada's abundance of supply gives this country the potential to generate significant economic opportunity.

Also in 2022, the Province named newly elected Timmins MPP George Pirie as the new Minister of Mines. Part of his mandate will be to develop the Ring of Fire, and he will focus on ensuring Ontario has the federal government on board as a “willing and full partner” in funding roads studies.³⁰

The Ring of Fire has been referred to as a “game changer,” and “the most promising mining opportunity Canada has seen in a century.” The Ring of Fire also offers a unique opportunity to be a template for the development of natural resources in remote and isolated locations alongside Indigenous communities. This type of framework can serve to help inform resource development across the country.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Continue to promote the development of the Ring of Fire as a project of provincial and national economic and social significance across all sectors so both levels of government can realize their goals set out in their respective Critical Minerals Strategies.

²⁸ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002031/ontario-and-first-nations-celebrate-historic-milestone-for-the-ring-of-fire>

²⁹ <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/progressive-conservative-leader-doug-ford-touts-party-s-progress-in-ring-of-fire-plan-1.5893230>

³⁰ <https://www.timminstoday.com/local-news/george-pirie-takes-the-helm-as-mines-minister-5653730>

2. Continue to work with the federal government, industry, and community partners to build capacity and community readiness of Indigenous communities so that they may take full advantage of resource development in the Ring of Fire.
3. Actively promote the Ring of Fire, along with other mining projects, in the global arena as a trade and investment opportunity.
4. Strengthen the partnerships with the federal government, the private sector, and Indigenous communities to explore innovative technologies and R & D opportunities to reduce energy costs and create efficiencies in the Ring of Fire.
5. Ensure Indigenous communities are active participants and proponents of these long-term projects.
6. Support mutually beneficial partnerships with Indigenous communities and businesses, including equitable opportunities for Indigenous procurement, employment, and economic development.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The submitting chamber amended the resolution based on suggestions made by the Policy & Advocacy Committee. The committee supports the resolution as amended.

19. Improve Early Childhood Educational Outcomes Through Expanded Education Opportunities, Targeted Programming, and Innovation in the Classroom

This is a sunseting resolution.

Submitted by: Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Ontario's long-term economic success relies on the quality of its workforce.

There is a strong connection between early childhood development, educational outcomes and future success. Ontario's unreasonably high child developmental vulnerability rate will have a negative impact on our future labour supply, including skilled workforce shortages and ultimately a loss of economic potential. This is especially true for areas of Ontario that are faced with low growth rates, low immigration rates, and an aging workforce. It is imperative for the future of our province that every child is given the best opportunity to succeed.

Background

Education is a pathway to a successful and sustainable labour market career. Over the next few years 70% of new and replacement jobs will demand post-secondary credentials, compared to 6% that will be available to individuals with less than high school education³¹.

Research shows that children's development at age 5 is a strong predictor of adult health, education and social outcomes. Many later problems like school failure, anti-social behaviour, obesity, high blood pressure, depression, type-2 diabetes, can be traced back to early childhood³².

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a tool that gathers information about children's development in their early years (birth to age 5). The most recent provincial EDI collection (2017/18) shows that the developmental vulnerability rate amongst young children in Ontario is near 30 percent, as measured by one or more of the five developmental scales. This does not include children who have an identified special need. Research states that such levels of vulnerability at school entry are at least five times higher than the rates of biological vulnerability that are detectable in the postnatal period³³. Especially concerning is the fact that the Ontario vulnerability rate is worsening rather than improving, having risen 2 percentage-points in the past ten years.

Drivers of vulnerability include socioeconomic adversity, physical issues like low birthweight, the lack of knowledge of an official language, increases in screen time and sedentary behaviour, limited opportunities to take on developmentally appropriate responsibility or self-care, inadequate sleep, inadequate nutrition, etc³⁴.

Children who are deemed vulnerable or at risk of being vulnerable on the EDI are less likely to achieve the provincial standards in the Grade 3 EQAO reading, writing and mathematics assessment than those with 118 higher EDI scores³⁵. Their education trajectories are likely to be lower and these children will face more

³¹ Lightman, E., Herd, D., Um, S. G., & Mitchell, A. (2009). Post-secondary education and social assistance in Ontario. *Canadian Social Work Review/Revue canadienne de service social*, 97-113.

³² Offord Centre for Child Studies. (2019). Retrieved from: <https://edi.offordcentre.com/about/what-is-the-edi/>.

³³ Kendall P.R.W. (2003) A Review of Infant Mortality in British Columbia: Opportunities for Prevention. Victoria, BC: Government of British Columbia, Office of the Provincial Health Officer in Kershaw, P., Warburton, B., Anderson, L., Hertzman, C., Irwin, L., & Forer, B. (2010). The Economic Costs of Early Vulnerability in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*. 2010;101(Suppl. 3): S8-S12.

³⁴ Buote, D. (2015). Increasing Vulnerability in the Early Years: A Closer Look at Five North Shore Neighbourhoods. Retrieved from: <http://nscr.bc.ca/pdf/Increasing%20Early%20Years%20Vulnerability.pdf>.

³⁵ Calman, R. C., & Crawford, P.J. (2013). Starting Early: Teaching, Learning and Assessment (pp. 1–37). Education Quality and Accountability Office.

challenges as they grow. Many will remain behind their peers throughout life, be disruptive in school, fail to graduate and unable to fully contribute and participate in society³⁶ and may rely on the social system (such as Ontario Works) for financial support.

Overall, grade 3 EQAO data shows a decline in writing skills over the previous three years (from 73% in 2015/16 to 69% in 2018/19). Assessments in math were similar to writing. In grade 3, 58% met the provincial math standard, a four percentage-point decrease from the average of the previous three years. If these trends continue unchecked, we should expect the number of students not meeting provincial standards in grade 6 to rise. We should also expect the number of children who are unprepared for high-school or post-secondary to rise over time.

There is a significant economic cost to vulnerability. A high vulnerability rate will dramatically deplete our future stock of human capital and will have a negative influence on the quality of our future labour market³⁷. Canadian economic analyses reveal that this depletion will cause Canada to forgo 20% in GDP growth over the next 60 years. The economic value of this loss is equivalent to investing \$2.2 trillion to \$3.4 trillion today at a rate of 3.5% interest, even after paying for the social investment required to reduce vulnerability³⁸.

Although governments face fiscal constraints, policy-makers should prioritize initiatives with high economic and social returns, such as early childhood education³⁹. There is a 7:1 return on investment for early childhood programming compared to a 1:1 payback for adult education⁴⁰.

There is evidence that the duration of early childhood education is an important factor in boosting math scores, which in turn leads to higher future wages⁴¹. With this in mind, the province should focus on expanding licensed early childhood education services in an affordable way which helps everyone equally regardless of their socio-economic situation.

For vulnerable children already in the school system, more targeted programming and an increase in teacher/student interaction time can help close the gap between them and their peers. Research shows that appropriate supports and interventions during the primary school years will allow many children who were not on track in kindergarten to address early challenges and proceed on a positive academic trajectory⁴². For children who are significantly behind their peers, a combination of grade retention and targeted programming should be investigated as an option. Researchers/data analysts at the Ministry of Education should conduct a review of the educational outcomes of Ontario children who were retained to determine if grade retention has a positive long-lasting effect on struggling students.

³⁶ Calman, R. C., & Crawford, P.J. (2013). *Starting Early: Teaching, Learning and Assessment* (pp. 1–37). Education Quality and Accountability Office.

³⁷ Kendall P.R.W. (2003) *A Review of Infant Mortality in British Columbia: Opportunities for Prevention*. Victoria, BC: Government of British Columbia, Office of the Provincial Health Officer in Kershaw, P., Warburton, B., Anderson, L., Hertzman, C., Irwin, L., & Forer, B. (2010). *The Economic Costs of Early Vulnerability in Canada*. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*. 2010;101(Suppl. 3): S8-S12.

³⁸ Kendall P.R.W. (2003) *A Review of Infant Mortality in British Columbia: Opportunities for Prevention*. Victoria, BC: Government of British Columbia, Office of the Provincial Health Officer in Kershaw, P., Warburton, B., Anderson, L., Hertzman, C., Irwin, L., & Forer, B. (2010). *The Economic Costs of Early Vulnerability in Canada*. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*. 2010;101(Suppl. 3): S8-S12.

³⁹ Alexander, C., Beckman, K., Macdonald, A., Renner, C., & Stewart, M. *Ready for Life: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2017.

⁴⁰ Pascal C.E. (2009). *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

⁴¹ Alexander, C., Beckman, K., Macdonald, A., Renner, C., & Stewart, M. *Ready for Life: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2017.

⁴² Calman, R. C., & Crawford, P.J. (2013). *Starting Early: Teaching, Learning and Assessment* (pp. 1–37). Education Quality and Accountability Office.

Furthermore, many teachers indicate that only 49% of their time is spent in direct interaction with students, with “time” being the most important barrier to providing personalized learning⁴³. An innovative approach is to use automation technology to reduce time spent on preparation, administration, evaluation, and feedback, saving approximately 13 hours per week⁴⁴. Teachers could redirect that time toward activities that lead to higher student outcomes such as instruction, engagement, and coaching. Further investments in permanent teaching assistants may also help decrease the burden of preparation and administration work that teachers commonly face.

Recommendations

1. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:
2. Expand affordable early childhood education (i.e., licensed childcare) to include 3-year-olds identified as developmentally vulnerable to reduce the number of these children in Ontario
3. Place a focus on catching up vulnerable (and at-risk of being vulnerable) children to their peers through targeted programming and early interventions.
4. Identify communities/regions that have consistently higher child vulnerability rates than the Ontario average and increase their funding for targeted programming.
5. Investigate the effectiveness of grade retention combined with targeted programming for children significantly behind their peers.
6. Utilize automation technology in the classroom to reduce teacher preparation and administration time so they can spend more time directly interacting with students.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

⁴³ Bryant, J., Heitz, C., Sanghvi, S. & Wagle, D. (2020). How artificial intelligence will impact K-12 teachers. New York: McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/how-artificial-intelligence-will-impact-k-12-teachers>.

⁴⁴ Bryant, J., Heitz, C., Sanghvi, S. & Wagle, D. (2020). How artificial intelligence will impact K-12 teachers. New York: McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/how-artificial-intelligence-will-impact-k-12-teachers>.

20. Improving Skilled Trades in the Secondary Schools

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Mississauga Board of Trade

Issue

Many businesses cite lack of workers in the skilled trades to fill positions within their companies today and into the future. There is a general concern that young people are not getting encouragement and opportunity to participate and learn about skilled trades at an early age so they can give serious consideration to a career in the skilled trades while in high school.

Background

The Mississauga Board of Trade (MBOT) authored a report entitled “Review of Skilled Trades in the Secondary School System” which looked at the current state of skilled trades training and curriculum in high schools and made recommendations that can improve and support this going forward.

MBOT met with representatives of all four local school boards and teachers in the Regional Skilled Trades program and found great support and interest in supporting and expanding skilled trades courses in the secondary schools.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Allow for the engagement of outside skilled trade expertise to teach segments of classes where this involvement is either warranted or required. The School Boards should be able to compensate these instructors working along with the designated Teacher for the class.
2. Ensure that School Boards have the budget and resources to obtain the proper, up-to-date equipment to teach skilled trades. The Ministry should encourage companies to donate equipment to the schools and be eligible for a tax receipt for the donation.
3. Continually assess co-op placement programs to ensure the rapid pace of technological change and industry requirements is met.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

21. In the Spirit of Business

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: The Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce, 1000 Islands Gananoque Chamber of Commerce, Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Port Hope and District Chamber of Commerce, Belleville Chamber of Commerce, Quinte West Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Currently, the policy regime applied to craft brewery and winery industries is not aligned with the one applied to the craft distillery industry, resulting in challenges for growth and sustainability of the sector as an integral part of Ontario's economy.

Background

Craft distilling is an industry in rapid growth. Distillers are creating jobs and boosting economies in large and small centres. The segment supports 6000 jobs in Ontario and annually contributes \$1.5 billion to Ontario's Gross Provincial Product, while craft distillers and the spirit industry generate over \$2.5 billion in annual sales.

The spirits industry works closely with local farmers, connects to tourism and hospitality industries, and contributes to the economic growth of rural areas across Ontario.

However, significant challenges still need to be addressed, *i.e.*, tax at craft distillery tasting rooms is 61.5%, which is 10 times what Ontario wineries pay. Additionally, craft distilleries do not receive recognition for using ingredients produced in Ontario.

For these reasons the craft distillery industry should be considered in policymaking.

In its 2019 report, "Refreshing the Sale of Beverage Alcohol in Ontario", the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) identifies several positive economic results from the industry that would only be enhanced by parity with the other sectors of beverage alcohol, including:

- The spirits industry and craft distillers in Ontario generate over \$2.5 billion in annual sales.
- The spirits industry supports 6,000 jobs across the province and contributes \$1.5 billion to Ontario's Gross Provincial Product every year.
- Ontario is currently home to 45 spirit distillers (as of December 2021). There has been an increase in the number of small and artisan distillers that specialize in niche products across Canada.
- The spirits industry works closely with local farmers and contributes to the economic growth of rural areas across Ontario.

The report also connects the beverage alcohol industry to several adjacent industries, including farming, tourism, and hospitality. The power of beverage alcohol to be a force for economic development – particularly rural economic development – should, therefore, be reflected in policymaking.

The province of Nova Scotia continues to be a leader in the spirits industry since the government opened the door to growth in 2014 by reducing the mark up by 60-80% with another 10% mark down if distillers use provincially grown agriculture products. The government cut the license fee from \$2000 to \$500, increased production threshold, and introduced a graduated mark up based on annual production. These measures allowed craft distillers to thrive. In British Columbia, since the introduction of a graduated tax system, the industry has grown from 17 to 48 distilleries in the province.

Craft spirits are considerably more laborious to produce than large-scale industrial spirits and are also marketed at higher prices. Any short-term revenue reductions from lower LCBO mark ups and tasting room taxes will be surpassed by the increased revenue from higher employment and consumers supporting local premium spirits that will come from a thriving craft distillery industry.

In the past few years there has been some movement towards parity with other craft alcohol industries, such as:

- Allowing craft distillers to distribute their products to bars and restaurants.
- Allowing craft distillers to open “Pop-up” retail stores via Special Occasion Permits; and
- The continuation of “The Small Cidery and Small Distillery Program” for a three-year commitment (expires in 2025).

Craft distillers believe these changes are a step in the right direction, but additional changes are required to reach parity with other craft alcohol industries in Ontario. For example, the update to “Canada’s Guidance on Alcohol and Health” recognizes that the consumption of beverage alcohol is equivalent across different categories, therefore craft distillers believe it is possible to have all regulations regarding alcohol align to the same standards.

This call for change is not only coming from the chambers of commerce and boards of trade but also from Craft Spirits Ontario.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Remove the LCBO fees applied to sales from Craft Distilleries directly to licensees: (Currently the LCBO receives a fee for any direct sale from a craft distillery to a licensee. The craft distiller makes the spirit, generates the sale, packages the product, ships the product, and bills the licensee but the LCBO receives a fee. Even if the craft spirit is not available through the LCBO).
2. Align the craft distiller’s regulations with the craft beer and wine industry by raising the rebate rate in “The Small Cidery and Small Distillery Program” to have an equivalent net tax on wine and spirits: (Nova Scotia and British Columbia are the leaders in the industry offering graduated tax rates. Ontario should consider a similar program so craft distillers across Canada are treated equally. New craft distilleries are choosing NS and BC to start their businesses rather than Ontario).
3. Lower the LCBO markup on spirits made primarily with Ontario ingredients from small Ontario facilities to be equivalent to microbreweries, graduated by production method and volume.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

22. Industry, educational institutions, and government working collaboratively in developing and advancing Ontario's skilled labour workforce with the skills required to meet industry needs.

Submitted by: Oakville Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Attracting and retaining a skilled workforce is a challenge for employers. The aging demographic, retiring workforce will add continued pressure on the business community. Government needs to work collaboratively with post-secondary institutions and industry to ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills and talent that meets future workforce demands.

Background

One of the biggest hurdles for many Oakville businesses is renewing their workforce. According to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce Canadian Survey on Business Conditions Report, Q3 2022, 39% of respondents identified recruiting skilled employees as an obstacle to business over the next three months, 37% listed a shortage of labour force, and 31% identified retaining skilled employees.

Uncertainty persists around the labour market, and it is putting pressure on organizations and their employees. As such, organizations are increasingly pursuing qualified professionals to fill all types of roles. These organizations look for talent that can deliver immediate and long-lasting contributions. So, they are likely to pursue candidates with extensive industry skills and experience.

For job seekers, now may be an ideal time to enroll in courses and training programs in their respective industries. By earning certifications and building their skill sets, these job seekers are well-equipped to stand out to potential employers. Plus, these job seekers can boost the likelihood of landing the best jobs and maximizing their earnings.⁴⁵

The business community will benefit from a plan to create an environment that is conducive to new investment, talent attraction and opportunity creation. This includes adapting and evolving to a changed business landscape. Consequently, all levels of governments need to work collaboratively with the business community and support the work of economic development to attract the next generation of talent to Oakville.

Attracting and retaining new talent to Ontario is of critical importance. By prioritizing the attraction of new talent to Oakville, we can minimize the potential challenges associated with a skills gap as a large portion of our labour force and knowledge base retires.

The Oakville Chamber and the business community understand the need for collaboration to address job vacancies. Policymakers need to take action to address skills mismatches and future workforce needs. This should include working with employers and post-secondary institutions to narrow the digital skills gap, advance skilled trades and tap into youth and immigrant talent pipelines.

Furthermore, over the next few decades, the Greater Golden Horseshoe is expected to experience incredible growth. Ontario has been, and continues to be, one of the fastest growing jurisdictions in North America. By 2041, the population is projected to grow by 50 percent, to 13.5 million, in the GGH alone. Similarly, the number of jobs in the region is expected to grow from 4.5 million to 6.3 million.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ [Employment Professionals Canada](#)

⁴⁶ Brad Graham and Tom McCormack, "Improving the Growth Plan: A commentary," September 2015
http://ohba.ca/system/documents/documents/340/original/improving_the_Growth_Plan_PDF.pdf?1441817423

Locally, the Region's population is forecast to grow from nearly 600,000 today to 1,000,000 by 2041. Similarly, Halton's strong economic growth—particularly in trade-oriented and high skilled service industries—is anticipated to continue: the Region is forecast to grow from about 264,000 jobs today to 470,000 jobs by 2041.⁴⁷

Therefore, the business community, industry, education and government need to work collaboratively to be responsive to employers' input in developing and advancing Ontario's labour workforce.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. The government to develop a workforce strategy that is responsive to industry needs in advancing Ontario's labour workforce.
2. The government to increase capital and operational funding and expand eligibility to colleges for skills training programs and infrastructure like the Skills Development Fund.
3. The government to continue advocating for greater control over immigrant nominations in the province and strengthening Ontario's nominee program.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

⁴⁷ [Integrated Growth Strategy](#)

23. Invest in Workforce Planning Boards

Submitted by: Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce, Port Hope and District Chamber of Commerce, Belleville Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Workforce challenges are one of the biggest barriers to economic growth in Ontario. It is essential that businesses, non-profits and charities have access to as many workforce resources and tools as possible. After years of funding cuts and precarious one-year funding agreements, now is the time to re-invest in all 26 Workforce Planning Boards across the Province of Ontario with increased funding and three-year contracts.

Background

Rebuilding our local economy will take years and a series of calculated investments from the private sector. The single biggest hurdle for many is rebuilding their workforce, especially in the skilled trades, health care and service sectors like tourism, retail, food service, and hospitality.

According to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce Canadian Survey on Business Conditions Report, Q3 2022, 39% of respondents identified Recruiting skilled employees as an obstacle to business over the next three months, 37% listed a shortage of labour force, and 31% identified retaining skilled employees.

Access to thorough, accurate and no-cost labour information and expertise will play a critical role in how the business community adapts, plans for the future of work and influences our economic growth.

Our local Workforce Planning Boards are an indispensable and vital partner in rebuilding our workforce. They bring decades of direct experience in identifying and addressing labour market and workforce development trends, opportunities and priorities within their catchment areas. Local businesses regularly use Workforce Planning Board resources and data tools like the free local online job boards, Census tools and Labour Market Information Help Desks. The annual Local Labour Market Planning Report provides crucial summaries of key data and qualitative feedback gathered through local consultation and collaboration with industry, businesses, training and employment service providers.

In order to provide local labour market information, service coordination and public education, Workforce Planning Boards need more sustainable funding. Operating on one-year contracts on budgets that have decreased over the years has made it difficult to recruit and retain talent to provide these services.

We are aware that part of the request is to receive an increase in operational funding in order for Workforce Planning Board's to continue to recruit and retain talent to provide these services and a shift from one-year agreements to three-year agreements to ensure that activities and local initiatives are adequately resourced and stable. The current labour market and economy requires certainty and a steadfastness and strength of leadership. Operationalizing plans for the future of work is very difficult to achieve within a one-year time frame. Three-year contracts will enable the Chamber of Commerce to work effectively with our local Workforce Planning Board's to complete a number of activities identified in their Local Labour Market Planning Report that includes an Action Plan with a three-year outlook.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Increase the funding for each Workforce Planning Board to cover the cost of LMI Help Desk Services, the Local Jobs Hub, and website maintenance and updates.
2. Increase the length of funding agreements with Workforce Planning Boards to three years.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

24. Investing in Ontario's International Undergraduate Student Entrepreneurs

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Leamington Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Ontario attracts an increasing number of international students each year. The Ministry of Advanced Education has estimated international students will account for 20 per cent of all Ontario post-secondary enrolments by 2022.⁴⁸ These students have an incredible impact on the local economy.

With an increasing talent shortage across the province coupled with a significant business succession issue, it is vital that international students are encouraged to remain in Ontario to continue their positive effect on the economy.

The Ontario Government can support international undergraduate student entrepreneurs by creating a nominee program to provide a more expedient pathway to permanent residency. Both Nova Scotia⁴⁹ and Saskatchewan⁵⁰ have implemented such pathways in recent years.

Background

International student enrollment in Canada is on the rise. Since 2014 there has been a 73 per cent increase in enrolments bringing the 2018 total to 572,000.⁵¹ The total number of post-secondary international students in Canada as of December 31, 2018 was 435,415, a 17 per cent jump over 2017 (370,975).⁵² In 2017, Ontario hosted 48 per cent of the nation's international students.⁵³

The positive impact of international students to the economy is remarkable. Approximately 170,000 jobs were created nationally as a result of international student spending in 2017.⁵⁴ International students contributed \$21.6 billion to the Canadian economy in 2018 with international student tuition surpassing government grants as a revenue source for many colleges and universities across the province.^{55,56}

⁴⁸ [Proportion of UWindsor international students more than doubled since 2006](#) (CBC News · Posted: Jun 17, 2019)

⁴⁹ [International Graduate Entrepreneur, Nova Scotia Immigration](#)

⁵⁰ [Sask. Government aims to make immigration easier for entrepreneurial international students](#) (Global News – Posted December 3, 2019)

⁵¹ [International education in Canada is booming – but the system is flawed. Here's how to fix it \(The Star – September 28, 2019\)](#)

⁵² [Another record year from Canadian international education – Canadian Bureau for International Education](#)

⁵³ [International Students in Canada](#) (Canadian Bureau for International Education, August 2018)

⁵⁴ Semotiuk, A. J. (2018, NOV 16). [International Students Pour into Canada While the U.S. and Others Lag Behind](#). (Forbes – November 13, 2019)

⁵⁵ [Ibid, International education in Canada is booming.](#)

⁵⁶ [The University of Toronto noted that international student fees accounted for 30 percent of revenue, more than provincial grants \(25 percent\). \(University Affairs – May 6, 2019\).](#) At St. Clair College in Windsor-Chatham, the 2019-20 budget shows for the first time that international student tuition is the largest source of revenue, with a projected \$71.8 million. By comparison, operating grants are \$41.3 million, and tuition for its budgeted 7,600 domestic students is about \$24.3 million. This fall, the college, which has seen its population of international students grow from 500 in 2014 to 4,200 in 2018, increased tuition for new international students by 15 per cent.

Some of these students come from entrepreneurial families who wish to expand their family business into Canada. Others may have the desire to purchase established businesses which would address the nation's growing business succession issue.⁵⁷

Currently, international students must find an eligible work position before applying for permanent residence status.⁵⁸ This puts their entrepreneurial ambitions on hold. If they could commence their business plans after graduation, they would become not an employee, but an employer, boosting the local economy even further.

The Nova Scotia International Graduate Entrepreneur program is a model program that can be adopted and implemented by the Ontario government to encourage settlement, investment, and entrepreneurship for International Students. The immigration stream requires an applicant to own at least one-third of a business with active ownership and management for a period of one year prior to application. The applicant must also have completed a degree or diploma from a Nova Scotia post-secondary institution and have a post-graduation work permit.⁵⁹ This program can facilitate the transition of international students into active workforce participants with a vested interest in their local economy.

Needing to find employment often means these students move to larger city centers. When eligible, the majority will choose to start their new business in the city of their employment – not the city where they completed their studies leading to a huge economic loss for the smaller cities of Ontario.

Ontario does not currently have an Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) in place, but most international students will not meet the requirements of this program.⁶⁰

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Emulate Nova Scotia's International Graduate Entrepreneur program that allows international students who start or operate their own company in Ontario and meet the eligibility requirements to apply for Permanent Residency.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

⁵⁷ 2006 data shows that 60 per cent of the Canadian population works for a small business, with approximately 45 per cent of Canada's economy coming from small-medium size businesses (Bruce, D., & Picard, D., 2006. Making succession a success: Perspectives from Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 44(2), 306-309.). Only 20 per cent of these businesses have a succession plan in place (Motwani, J., Levenburg, N. M., Schwarz, T. V., & Blankson, C. (2006). Succession Planning in SMEs. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship*, 24(5), 471-495.). Matching eligible international student entrepreneurs with successful businesses seeking a successor could help address this growing issue.

⁵⁸ [OINP Employer Job Offer: International Student Stream.](#) and [Ontario Immigration Nominee Program: Masters Stream.](#) [The OINP program allows for nominations for Masters level graduates who meet certain conditions. There is no such program for undergraduate international students. Undergraduate students must obtain viable employment and have sufficient work experience to meet residency requirements before applying for permanent residence.](#)

⁵⁹ [– International Graduate Entrepreneur \(novascotiaimmigration.com\)](#)

⁶⁰ [Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program \(OINP\).](#)

25. Making the Ontario Energy Board hearing process more accessible

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste Marie Chamber of Commerce, Timmins Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The current Ontario Energy Board (OEB) framework relating to cost eligibility and cost awards (the framework) makes stakeholder participation prohibitively expensive. As an example, the OEB does not:

- advise parties who are eligible to receive cost awards at the outset of hearings (e.g. proceedings or consultations/policy initiatives)
- guarantee costs associated with participation will be reimbursed; and
- advise parties of the percentage of costs that will be reimbursed.

These costs and the framework are significant barriers to full participation by stakeholders with limited resources. In addition, the Board has pre-determined that certain groups are not eligible for any costs even if they are accepted as an intervenor (i.e., organizations representing municipalities or groups of municipalities).

Background

The Ontario Energy Board regulates electricity and natural gas in Ontario, in part by decisions made during hearings on a variety of energy issues including pricing of energy, regulation of generation and distribution of electricity, and for various energy projects that affect the interests of the business community across the province.

In response to requests from the Ontario Minister of Energy to review intervenor processes and identify opportunities to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, the OEB has undertaken consultations and developed an Action Plan with a timeline for completion by March 31, 2024. Currently implemented, the framework relating to cost eligibility and cost awards is prohibitively complex which results in uncertainty and increased expense for stakeholders with limited resources. The OEB has set up processes and guidelines which parties, in hearings before the Board (i.e., participants that want to actively contribute to the decision-making process), must prove that they should be granted Intervenor Status (deemed eligible to receive cost awards; and awarded an amount of costs). Although the OEB sets the guidelines as noted above, such guidelines are further scrutinized by the OEB and are reviewed using a significant amount of discretion.

The OEB prescribes an avenue for reimbursing some of the costs to participants through separate application processes that are also subject to almost full discretion of the OEB. Organizations or individual participants with limited resources are *advised* to hire legal professionals such as lawyers, paralegals or analysts at their own expense and then apply for reimbursement of the costs that would be calculated according to the OEB's own guidelines. There is no guarantee of what would be accepted as an eligible cost and at what percentage such expense will be reimbursed (if at all). This process is a significant barrier to full participation, especially by groups in small and rural areas with limited cash resources.

Many of the applications to the OEB are extremely technical in nature. As such, organizations that are not in the 'business' of intervening require external expertise to assist them in preparing the material for submitting to the OEB and in examining the materials submitted by the applicant and other intervenors. The more complex the application, the higher the costs will be assumed. When funding is restricted or approved at a late stage, the participation will be less diligent in order to reduce costs.

An example that illustrates the high cost of participation is the recent OEB hearing about alternative mechanisms for natural gas expansion. A group of stakeholders from Northwestern Ontario registered as intervenors and spent more than \$70,000 to actively participate in the hearing by submitting evidence, arguments and interrogatories (written questions) and by cross-examining witnesses. The decision by the OEB on the issue most was to uphold the status quo. The application for the reimbursement of costs associated with the hearing took nearly a year to receive a decision to reimburse 98% of the costs and for those costs to be paid out. There was no advance notice whether all the costs incurred by the group would be reimbursed by OEB's cost award decision. Some of the solutions to mitigate the barriers to participation in the OEB hearings can be found in the National Energy Board (NEB) intervenor process. The intervenors in the NEB process are advised up front of the costs that will be eligible and how much of the cost will be recovered, based on the funds available for that particular issue. The participants can then decide if they will proceed with the application to be a participant in the hearings, and if so, the depth of their participation. The NEB also provides upfront funding to assist with the costs of the participants whereas the OEB process requires that the participants pay for all costs and then apply for partial reimbursement.

The other issue is the outright prohibition of any funding for municipalities or groups of municipalities. As very few municipalities now own their own electrical utility, there is no longer any conflict of interest with a municipality opposing a rate increase initiated by their own Local Distribution Companies (LDC). They should not be forced to fund their own intervention into an Ontario Power Generation (OPG) or Hydro One rate increase. In addition, when it comes to broad policy issues as opposed to rate proposals, groups of municipalities can and do represent their region before the OEB. Those policy decisions tend to relate to issues outside of the municipal boundaries. It should not be the responsibility of the property taxpayer to fund the community's response to existing or proposed policy or rule changes under consideration by the OEB.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario (via the Ontario Energy Board) to:

1. Create a more transparent and predictable process for cost eligibility and cost awards for participation in OEB hearings.
2. Provide sufficient additional funding for participants, ensuring full participation for cost eligible participants in OEB hearings by:
 - a. Providing for an OEB process that takes into consideration the eligible participant's actual capacity to pay for full participation in the OEB hearings and upholds the principle of fairness for all stakeholders; and
 - b. Providing for OEB to release advanced funding for costs so all eligible participants can benefit from an up-front amount that covers the costs of initializing and participating in the OEB hearings and for experts (if required). A hold-back can be put in place subject to final submission of expenses etc.
3. Amend the cost eligibility and cost awards processes by:
 - a. Advising parties whether they are eligible to receive cost awards at the outset of the hearings and what specific costs they are eligible for;
 - b. Guaranteeing costs associated with participation will be reimbursed;
 - c. Allowing organizations that represent municipalities and groups of municipalities to be eligible for cost awards; and
 - d. Advising parties in advance of the percentage of costs that will be reimbursed.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

26. More systems needed in place to encourage women to pursue a career in skilled trades

This is a sunseting resolution.

Submitted by: Cambridge Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Guelph Chamber of Commerce & Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce

Issue

A severe and chronic shortage of skilled trade workers continues to dog the Ontario landscape, despite more than 30 years of ongoing discussion among business, education, and government leaders on how to solve the problem.

While a strong focus remains on streamlining immigration policies to introduce some of the world's mostly highly skilled individuals into our labour force more seamlessly, the fact that an existing pool of potential talent already exists among Canada's female population remains virtually untapped unless the necessary encouragement and programming are provided.

Background

Ontario, and Canada in general, are dealing with a severe shortage of skilled trade workers. In fact, a report released in January of 2022 by Employment and Social Development Canada projects that 700,000 skilled trades workers are expected to retire by 2028⁶¹.

Left hidden among these staggering number is the fact only 5% of all tradespeople in Canada are women, according to Statistics Canada, noting this includes 84% of workers in hairstyling and aesthetics are women⁶².

As outlined in a CBC report in June 2019, Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey indicated as of 2018 approximately 34,800 women were working in industrial, electrical and construction trades nationwide. This represents an increase of 200 women, just under 3.9%, compared to a decade earlier. However, during this same 10-year span there were 38,600 fewer people of the overall 934,000 that were working in trades in 2008⁶³.

Furthermore, it's been noted in the first quarter of 2019 that there were 60,170 job vacancies in Red Seal trades, an increase of 14 % from a year earlier, according to Statistics Canada's job vacancy and wage survey⁶⁴.

As for those currently rising through the training ranks, according to the Canada Labour Force Survey, only 1 in 10 apprentices in Canada are women and that most populate female-dominated programs including early childhood education (which isn't considered a skilled trade in all provinces)⁶⁵.

A 2019 report from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) praised Canada's economic immigration system and recommended streamlining and standardizing the ranking system for skilled workers entering this country and abolishing the Federal Skilled Trades Program. However, it has been noted that while immigration accounted for 80% of our population growth, there are projections indicating there are now only two workers ready to replace every skilled trade retiree in Canada by 2035 compared to seven that were available in 1971⁶⁶. This is another indication that filling the skilled trades gap must be accomplished using as many avenues as possible – noting the benefits of enhanced productivity and increased creativity a diversified

⁶¹ Canadian skilled trades shortage has a simple solution - women' – Oct. 25, 2022, (The Hamilton Spectator)<https://bit.ly/3icbQcr>

⁶² Women are the Solution to Canada's Skilled Trades Shortage' – (Niagara & Halton Skilled Trades Academy)<https://bit.ly/3GBMUEF>

⁶³ Here's where Canadians are finding well-paying jobs in the trades' – July 12, 2019 (CBC) <https://bit.ly/2YRXjUB>

⁶⁴ 'Canada must adapt quickly to attract skilled workers, immigration minister says' – Aug. 13/2019 (CBC) <https://bit.ly/2MeJs8b>

⁶⁵ Here's where Canadians are finding well-paying jobs in the trades' – July 12, 2019 (CBC). <https://bit.ly/2YRXjUB>

⁶⁶ 'Majority of women in Canada are living paycheque to paycheque' – Sept. 30/2019 LowestRates.ca. <https://bit.ly/2RYhrEa>

workforce brings – so creating more awareness to encourage more young women about the benefits of pursuing a career in these fields is important.

In 2019, the annual BDO Canada Affordability Index, which measures how affordable life is in Canada, indicated that nearly 60% of women are living paycheck to paycheck. #6 More recently, BDO's 2022 index found more 78% of Canadians said their personal finances have worsened due to inflation, while just over half (54%) indicated they're living paycheck to paycheck – an increase of three percentage points over 2021⁶⁷.

Education is key to raising awareness. In effort to promote skilled trades to all secondary school students, in 2019 the Ontario government has announced it was investing approximately \$75 million in three programs: \$12.7 million for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program; \$20.8 million in a pre-apprenticeship program; and \$52 million for the Specialist High Skills major program that has the potential to reach 54,000 students in 700 Ontario high schools through more than 2,100 programs^{68 69}.

As well, in March of 2022, the Ontario government announced a \$28 million investment to expand its pre-apprenticeship training to provide young people with the training they need for careers in skilled trades⁷⁰.

Also, continued co-op programs in many secondary schools and having students from grades 7 to 12 participate in province-wide skills competitions organized by Skills Ontario and Skills Canada provide opportunities for them to experience the world of skilled trades over a period of a few days. As well, additional supports are provided by more localized initiatives such as Your Pathways, Your Choice, operated by the Career Education Council, which interactively assist Grade 8 students in Guelph by showcasing potential career paths, and the BEP (Business and Education Partnership) Waterloo Region, which introduces secondary students to various careers through an assortment of programs.

In terms of ongoing education for younger students, in our area, the Waterloo Region District School Board does provide tech rooms in some of its grades 7 and 8 schools centred on woodworking, while its counterpart, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, provides STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) kits to assist students who show an interest in those areas. Additional skilled trades learning opportunities are provided by neighbouring boards, including the Upper Grand District School Board and Wellington Catholic District School Board.

In hopes of attracting more female students, one-day initiatives such as the annual Build a Dream at Bingemans in Kitchener, helps promote skilled trades to grades 7 to 12 girls and attracts at least 1,200 students. Also, Conestoga College's 'Jill of All Trades' event is held annually and gives approximately 200 grades 9 to 12 students from eight school boards the chance to get 'hands-on' experience under the guidance of female mentors in one day. Conestoga College, which has consolidated its various trade schools after transforming the former 250,000-square-foot Erwin Hymer plant in Cambridge into its Skilled Trades Campus, also provides 'Explore Your Future' days to give Grade 8 students the chance to tour and participate in hands-on activities in specific trades.

⁶⁷ 'BDO Affordability Index 2022' – Sept. 29, 2022 (BDO). <https://bit.ly/3CpyZ1X>

⁶⁸ 'Ontario increasing investments in skilled trades' – Nov. 8/2019 – (Ontario Newsroom) <https://bit.ly/3GhuN17>

⁶⁹ 'Ontario helping more young people start careers in the skilled trades' – March 16/2022 (Ontario Newsroom). <https://bit.ly/3IGnO9l>

⁷⁰ 'Ontario helping more young people start careers in the skilled trades' – March 16/2022 (Ontario Newsroom). <https://bit.ly/3IGnO9l>

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Ontario Government to:

1. Continue to market a career in skilled trades as a viable employment option, and ensure intentional outreach is extended to girls and women.
2. Allow students graduating from high school with an interest in any skilled trade to apply to the college of their choice, regardless if they have found employment in the industry.
3. Consider working with industry and post-secondary institutions to offer more opportunities at colleges with skilled trades programs to host similar events modelled after Conestoga College's 'Jill of All Trades', in hopes of ensuring more high school students have the opportunity to experience skilled trades training.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

27. Ontario's Readiness for Urban Mobility – Smart cities and digital transformation

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Milton Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Oakville Chamber of Commerce, Burlington Chamber of Commerce, and Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The province has a role to support the application of data and innovative technologies that enable municipalities to establish intelligent transportation networks and optimize urban mobility. The future efficient movement of both people and goods and services will depend on the effective management of a connected infrastructure.

Background

A reliable transportation network is essential for trade, the movement of goods and services as well as people. It is also integral to our province's economic competitiveness. As our communities become more connected through the collection of data, artificial intelligence and technology, it is vital that we are prepared for the business climate of the future and that we remain competitive with other jurisdictions. The market for automated and connected vehicles is growing rapidly and large economic benefits are expected. According to McKinsey, investors have spent over \$200 billion USD on autonomous-vehicle technologies and smart mobility in the last decade.⁷¹

Population growth as well as increased employment growth is positive for our local economy; however, it also underlines the need for building a resilient transportation network that works for all modes of transportation to supply the movement of goods and people.

Ontario has taken steps towards becoming a leader in the development, commercialization and adoption of advanced mobility technologies, like Connected Vehicles/Autonomous Vehicles (CA/AV). Ontario was the first Canadian province to permit on-road testing of autonomous vehicles in 2016, updating its pilot regulation to match other global AV testing jurisdictions in 2019.⁷² Since then, Ontario has launched the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network (OVIN), which funds collaborative research projects, supports SMEs to commercialize technologies, and aims to develop a strong mobility workforce and talent pipeline through skills development and training.⁷³ Moreover, Ontario has begun investments in intelligent transportation system (ITS) technologies along provincial highways, in order to support mobility innovations like connected and automated vehicles.⁷⁴

The creation of a dedicated program could further incentivize municipalities to invest in infrastructure/technological updates within their local jurisdictions, thereby creating a healthy environment for emerging transportation technologies.

It is vital that municipalities engage in the development of a technological transportation system where data from smart infrastructure, transportation networks, and connected vehicles can empower planners, transit agencies, and other municipal leaders to make advancements in urban mobility. The future efficient movement of both people and goods and services will depend on the effective management of a connected infrastructure. As the industry evolves and becomes a reality, it will become a competitive economic advantage for municipalities that embrace it—and a disadvantage for communities that don't.

⁷¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/automotive-and-assembly/our-insights/mobilitys-future-an-investment-reality-check>

⁷² <https://files.ontario.ca/auto-strategy-en-final.pdf>

⁷³ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001266/ontario-launches-flagship-initiative-to-lead-development-of-ev-and-smart-transportation-technologies>

⁷⁴ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/connected-and-automated-vehicles>

The creation of a dedicated program could further incentivize municipalities to invest in infrastructure/technological updates within their local jurisdictions, thereby creating a healthy environment for emerging transportation technologies.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Encourage municipalities to include adoption of emerging transportation technologies in their short- and long-term “Transportation Master Plans (TMPs)” to ensure that they are prepared for the inevitable adoption of new modes of transportation (such as Connected and Autonomous Vehicles and related transportation infrastructure).
2. Create a dedicated program (e.g. matching funds) that encourages municipalities to invest in infrastructure/technological updates within their local jurisdictions, thereby creating a healthy environment for emerging transportation technologies.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

28. Ontario's Residential Tenancies Act

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Tillsonburg District Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce, Port Hope & District Chamber of Commerce, Quinte West Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Regulations under Ontario's Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) do not provide sufficient safeguards for landlords in the rental housing system. Other provincial legislation governing residential tenancies is more equitable, thereby making it more attractive for investment in those provinces. At the same time, limited capacity at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) continues to delay access to timely dispute resolutions.

Background

It is our view that the RTA should be changed to make it more equitable for all parties: tenants, landlords, and property managers. The existing Act could be strengthened to better hold tenants to their rental responsibilities and reduce unnecessary financial burdens and excessive delays on landlords and property managers and at the LTB. Areas for improvement in the RTA and at the LTB include: 1) Reducing Statutory Delays; and 2) Implementing a 15-minute, remote mediation process, which could reduce backlogs and eliminate the need for an in-person hearing in many cases.

We also understand that a major deterrent for real estate investors to create purpose-built affordable rental units is the inequity of the RTA and inefficiencies at the LTB. Making the Act more equitable for landlords, property managers, and tenants, will go a long way in attracting investment in our province in this sector and encourage more investors and homeowners to rent out their properties, which could also lead to the elimination of the need for the Vacant Homes Tax that is creating an extra burden for investors and homeowners.⁷⁵

Landlords and Property Managers are currently taking extra precautions and tightening up their tenant vetting processes, because they are concerned that if a tenant stops paying rent or destroys their property, it could delay the eviction process to a year or more. In the midst of record low rental vacancy rates, this is making it harder for people to find a place to live. A more equitable and efficient system would increase landlord confidence and would create stronger landlord-tenant relationships. For example, if landlords were confident in the system, tenants with poor credit scores could be allowed in more properties. In turn, this would help guard against the increasing homelessness and affordable housing crises.

In Alberta, for example, once a lease has ended the Landlord has the right to non-renewal. A landlord does not have to continue dealing with problematic tenants and ongoing delays.⁷⁶

Reducing Statutory Delays: Currently in Ontario if a tenant has not paid their rent, it is the landlord's responsibility to pay a \$170 filing fee and schedule a hearing after waiting 14 days before being able to file with the board. In British Columbia, if the rent is not paid, the onus is on the tenant to pay a \$100 filing fee to dispute an eviction. It is our opinion that British Columbia's Act places the responsibility in the right place: by making the tenant accountable for the expenses incurred to schedule a hearing with it is THEIR rent that has not been paid. Ontario's current process places unnecessary financial burdens on landlords and wastes valuable administrative time and associated costs for example: a tenant often doesn't attend a hearing and when they do attend, they are often only seeking to delay the process and have no actual proof of payment. Reducing statutory delays would reduce administrative burden on landlords, while also speeding up necessary mediation between

⁷⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes/excise-taxes-duties-and-levies/underused-housing-tax.html>

⁷⁶ "Ending a Tenancy," Government of Alberta, [Ending a tenancy | Alberta.ca](https://www.alberta.ca/ending-a-tenancy).

tenants and landlords, which currently sits at 61 days to evict a tenant. In the best-case scenario, a landlord needs to wait 14 days to file with the board, 30 days to get a hearing date, 3 days after the hearing to get the order, 11 days before filing with the sheriff and 3 days before the sheriff evicts the tenant. This amounts to 61 days and the landlord losing 1 to 2 months of rent (assuming the tenant paid a last month's rent deposit).

While the number of LTB adjudicators in Ontario jumped from 43 to 82 in 2020-2021, only two of those were full-time hires. The rest were only part-time, and they often split their caseloads between several different tribunals. Some split their time between as many as 6 different tribunals. Accordingly, despite the recent increase in adjudicator numbers there are still backlogs.⁷⁷

Following a pause on evictions and hearings during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the LTB says it aims to give hearings within 25 days. However, in summer 2022, the wait time averaged 8 months.⁷⁸

Remote Mediation Process: Recent changes at the LTB to allow applicants to submit relevant forms online as well as the option for an online dispute resolution process are welcome improvements. However, in cases where a hearing is still needed, the process in Ontario could be greatly improved. Instead of requiring an adjudicator to hear each case at the tribunal, many applications could be solved within 15 minutes through a remote process with a mediator (where sufficient broadband infrastructure and connectivity are available). This step would take place before an application is scheduled for a hearing, and in many cases could eliminate the need for a hearing altogether. This type of resolution process would take far less resources from both landlords and tenants, as well as the LTB.

Using teleconferencing or video conferencing for this process not only avoids scheduling a hearing in cases where it is not needed, thus saving valuable court time and tax dollars, it benefits employers because employees don't need to take time away from work for a lengthy court process. Implementing a 15-minute mediation process where relevant would be an effective way to improve the backlog the LTB is currently facing.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Amend the RTA to reduce statutory delays in the following ways:
 - a. To place the focus on ensuring sufficient resources are available to meet the timelines that are in place.
 - b. Provide the Landlord Tenant Board with financial resources necessary to reduce the wait time to 30 days or less for dispute resolution and/or hearing, and the necessary performance structure be put in place to ensure its success. An order should be issued within 3 days of the hearing and/or successful resolution order.
 - c. Allow landlords to file with the sheriff 5 days after an order is issued, instead of the current 11. Amend provincial laws (the Courts of Justice Act and the RTA) to explicitly allow private bailiffs to enforce Landlord Tenant Board orders, and to require orders that have been previously stayed to be placed in priority sequence.
2. Shorten the dispute process by introducing a remote, 15-minute mediation process where possible; this scheduled slot will allow both landlords and tenants to reduce their time away from their workplace commitments. It will also avoid unnecessary court hearings and reduce backlog.
3. To improve processes and capacity at LTB by hiring more full-time and part-time staff that only work for the LTB to assist with the backlogs of claims.

⁷⁷ Jon Woodward, 2022, "Most New Landlord and Tenant Board Adjudicators in Ontario are Part-Time," [Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Board delays: Review shows most new adjudicators are part time | CTV News](#).

⁷⁸ Stu Mills, 2022, "Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Board has Collapsed, Landlord Says," [Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Board has collapsed, landlord says | CBC News](#).

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The submitting chamber amended the resolution based on suggestions made by the Policy & Advocacy Committee. The committee supports the resolution as amended.

29. Opening the Job Market for Employers and Employees

Submitted by: Cambridge Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Finding a solution to Ontario's job shortages will require a multi-pronged approach consisting of unique ideas that take into consideration the diversity of labour needs among various sectors.

While a strong focus on streamlining immigration policies continues to build Canada's labour force, effort must also be made to reduce barriers for newcomers to find work, especially when it comes to accessing language training. As well, a potential workforce may already exist among many of those currently accessing the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) providing they continue to have the support they require to successfully function full-time in the workplace. Also, consideration is needed to provide more cost recovery opportunities to employers regarding provincially regulated training, such as employee time spent completing WHMIS training.

Background

Terms like 'The Great Resignation', 'quiet quitting', 'ghosting' and 'grey wave', have become commonplace to describe trends creating upheaval for employers in their quest to attract and retain workers.

While the pandemic is often identified as the catalyst behind Canada's continued labour shortage, many experts believe our labour force growth rate has been trending downward since 2000 and has been exacerbated by the arrival of COVID-19. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, in 2021 one in five Canadian workers were between the age of 55 to 64 – representing an all-time high of baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964). This translates into 1.4 million Canadians between 2016 to 2021 who are 55 or older and looking towards retirement.⁷⁹

Adding to this dilemma of a shrinking workforce, according to StatsCan, recruiting skilled workers was expected to be an obstacle for the first quarter of 2022 for 39.9% (approximately two-fifths) of all businesses.⁸⁰

The effects may be reflected in the results of an annual labour survey conducted in 2022 by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters' (CME) of 563 manufacturers in 17 industries nationwide which outlined the impact labour shortages were having by indicating a nearly \$13 billion loss in Canada's economy over the course of a year.⁸¹

While a job surge at the end of 2022 which saw the unemployment rate drop to 5% in December compared to 5.1% the prior month was welcomed news, StatsCan says a hike in illness-rated absences resulted in limited worker output.⁸² As well, while StatsCan says Canada's employment rate increased to 61.8% in December, compared to 61.5% the month before, the projected trend shows a drop to 60.9% in 2024 – with the potential to rebound and hit 62.2% in 2025.⁸³

The effect these fluctuations will have as employers continue to seek employees to fill the nearly one million job vacancies in Canada has yet to be determined, considering the results of a recent poll conducted by the recruitment firm Robert Half indicating half of Canadian workers are planning to seek new jobs in 2023 – nearly double the amount from a year ago. That poll, conducted this past fall from among 1,100 workers from

⁷⁹ <https://bit.ly/3kru36A>-Canada's aging workforce root of national labour shortage - CTV

⁸⁰ <https://bit.ly/3wmUhKf>-Labour shortage trends - Statistics Canada

⁸¹ <https://bit.ly/3XxT0vY>-Canada's economy lost nearly \$13B due to labour shortage: report – Global News

⁸² <https://bit.ly/3wsN0bU>-Strong December job growth muted by more sick workers – Global News

⁸³ <https://bit.ly/3HsQnWq>-Trading Economics website

multiple sectors, showed that 50% of respondents would be seeking new employment in the next six months (up from 31% six months ago). The top reasons for this shift not only include higher salaries, better benefits, and perks, but greater flexibility to decide when and where they work.⁸⁴

As current and potential employees weigh their options and re-evaluate their priorities and goals when it pertains to employment, Canada continues its concentrated effort to reach its immigration target of 1.4 million in three years – 465,000 newcomers in 2023, 485,000 in 2024 and 500,000 in 2025 – to fill these widening labour gaps.

In an effort to achieve these goals, the federal government announced new ‘selection tools’ this past fall aimed at ensuring skilled immigrants find work in their areas of expertise, noting via an Angus Reid Institute poll that at least one third of 500 newcomers surveyed downgraded their jobs to achieve an easier entry to Canada.⁸⁵ Canada’s immigration efforts have already seen a record-number 406,000 newcomers welcomed as permanent residents in 2021, with more than 191,000 work and study permit holders transitioned from temporary to permanent resident status.⁸⁶

While an influx of immigrants is welcomed news in hopes of easing labour shortages, the need to ensure resources are available to serve this growing population is imperative. Besides an adequate supply of housing, language training is just as important to provide them with a basic tool they need to enter the workforce even faster.

Currently, the federally-funded LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers) program is available through many post-secondary institutions, but all avenues at the provincial level - such as Ontario’s Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program, which received a \$60 million boost from the province in 2020 – must also be explored to ensure there are enough spaces available for these potential learners at the community level, such as with organizations like the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership.⁸⁷

In addition, while immigration is key when it comes to the rejuvenation of our labour force, an effort also needs to be made to explore other avenues when it comes to cultivating a potential workforce that may already exist, namely among some of the thousands who currently access the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

The province announced it was increasing the monthly earnings exemption this past fall for those on ODSP from \$200 to \$1,000 per month, allowing individuals on the program to keep 25 cents on the dollar, in hopes of allowing the 25,000 people currently in the workforce to keep more of their earnings and potentially encouraging an additional 25,000 more to enter the labour market.⁸⁸ Recent StatsCan figures indicate there were 372,000 job vacancies in Ontario during the third quarter of 2022 and that 60% of these required a high school education only, providing much opportunity for employment, but on average paid less than \$20 an hour.⁸⁹

While these job vacancies could be a positive step in assisting those ODSP recipients who have the capability to work, the province needs to provide assistance towards covering the costs of their needed supports (i.e. prescribed medications) especially if their employers do not, which could allow more to enter the labour market and in turn disengage from the program as they begin to contribute income tax, knowing they would not lose this ‘safety net’. With the appropriate support, it could be a major step in boosting the labour pool and reduce the number of people accessing ODSP.

⁸⁴ <https://bit.ly/3HtCGGT>- Half of Canadian workers will job hunt in 2023: poll - CBC

⁸⁵ <https://bit.ly/3R692KZ>-Canada to admit 1.4 million immigrants in three years to address labour shortages – Financial Post

⁸⁶ <https://bit.ly/403eHWt>-2022 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration

⁸⁷ <https://bit.ly/3HA0GIz>-Ontario spends \$60M on free language training for all immigrants – Immigration.ca

⁸⁸ <https://bit.ly/3WAatm8>-Ontario boosts income cap for ODSP recipients but no new changes for those who can’t work – CTV News

⁸⁹ <https://bit.ly/3kVEkbD>-Noticing a labour shortage? Here’s what’s really going on in Ontario’s job market - CBC

According to the Province, there were more than 595,000 (families and single adults) in Ontario's social assistance programs during 2020-21. Among these, 64% (approximately 378,145) were ODSP recipients, while as of November of 2022, there were just under 369,000 ODSP caseloads.⁹⁰

Also, many employers continue to face a 'revolving door' of new hires, each of whom requires provincially mandated WHMIS training. Providing this training to secondary school students could be a benefit to employers, considering many go directly into the workforce. The 2021 census results indicate at least 40% of workers aged of 25 to 64 are not post-secondary graduates.⁹¹ However, until any such change as this could occur employers have been left covering the costs of this training, which can take several hours to complete via a process that must be repeated with each new hire, taking them away from their work duties.

To assist employers cost recovery opportunities surrounding provincially regulated training programs, like WHMIS, should be considered to ease some of this burden.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Ontario Government to:

1. Develop all potential partnerships within local municipalities and community organizations to ensure that language training is made available for new immigrants.
2. Allow those on ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) who can work full time to do so without risking loss of their provincially funded benefits (i.e., prescribed medications) if their employer does not provide those services.
3. Investigate a form of remuneration (i.e., tax credit) for employers when it comes to providing provincially regulated training, such as WHMIS, and their associated costs.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

⁹⁰ <https://bit.ly/3kKElyZ>-Province of Ontario website

⁹¹ <https://tgam.ca/3Rn1qnn>-Census shows high rate of undergraduate and college education among Canadians, but complex trends lie behind it – Globe & Mail

30. Reducing Traffic Congestion On Ontario Highways Due to Vehicular Accidents

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Tillsonburg District Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce, Woodstock District Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Traffic congestion negatively affects the economy in numerous ways. People are frequently late to work when they are stuck in traffic, resulting in lost productivity and stress. It prevents deliveries from arriving on time, which can delay production, and congestion wastes fuel and causes vehicle emissions, thus increasing the cost of transporting goods and overall pollution levels.

Background

While vehicular accidents occur everywhere, they cause less traffic delays and highway closures in some jurisdictions than others based on the response systems that governments have in place. The state of Georgia's Department of Transportation (GDOT) has implemented measures to minimize closures and delays on metro Atlanta highways. Since 2008, GDOT has paid private wreckage companies in metro Atlanta a \$3,500 bonus to clear truck accidents in 90 minutes or less. Since the Towing and Recovery Incentive Program (TRIP) was launched, the average time to clear an accident plummeted by 80 percent, prompting GDOT to consider expanding the program across the state of Georgia.⁹²

The agency also works to keep traffic moving by using cameras to monitor highway conditions, and dispatches Highway Emergency Response Operators (HERO) units to help drivers, clear debris, and direct traffic after accidents occur. These efforts have a measurable impact because at least 50 percent of traffic congestion in the Atlanta region is caused by accidents.⁹³

Florida has similar programs in place under its Open Roads Policy, which sets the goal of clearing major highway incidents and truck crashes across the state in 90 minutes or less. Rapid Scene Clearance (RISC) is a program put in place under this policy which, like Georgia's, provides financial incentives to qualified and participating heavy duty towing service providers. In addition to financial incentives of a \$600 to \$3500 bonus for meeting response and clearance deadlines, the program is successful because its tow operators must meet equipment and training standards to be eligible to participate. This contrasts with systems in use elsewhere, where heavy-duty tow operators are called without consideration of their capabilities. The operators do not participate in a RISC-type program and so are not contractually obligated to meet training and equipment standards.⁹⁴

Such efforts are part of Traffic Incidence Management (TIM) quick clearance programs, which is the practice of rapidly and safely removing temporary obstructions from roadways in order to increase the safety of incident responders by minimizing their exposure to adjacent passing traffic, reduce the probability of secondary incidents, and relieve overall congestion. Quick clearance practices can result in many benefits for drivers, responders, and the environment, including decreases in:

- non-recurrent congestion delay;

⁹² Georgia Department of Transportation's (GDOT) Towing and Recovery Incentive Program (TRIP) Can Reduce Clearance Times by 80 Percent, U.S. Department of Transportation, [Georgia Department of Transportation's \(GDOT\) Towing and Recovery Incentive Program \(TRIP\) Can Reduce Clearance Times by 80 Percent. | ITS Deployment Evaluation](https://www.aic.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/gdot-tackles-truck-accidents-metro-atlanta-highways/ZXuWYCvFpBb9aaJihOixjL/).

⁹³ David Wickert, 2019, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/gdot-tackles-truck-accidents-metro-atlanta-highways/ZXuWYCvFpBb9aaJihOixjL/>.

⁹⁴ CAA, 2021; Traffic Incident Management, Florida Department of Transportation, <http://www.floridatim.com/Overview.htm>.

- secondary incidents, including those involving responders;
- response time to traffic incidents and other emergencies;
- vehicle fuel consumption;
- vehicle emissions;
- motorist stress levels;
- aggressive driving behaviour;
- freight movement impacts in the region;
- regional economy impacts;
- local tourism impacts; and
- future potential land use impacts.⁹⁵

While major urban areas in Canada typically have TIM practices in place, such as Ontario's COMPASS Transportation Management Centre, they are often not used to their full potential. A 2021 [CAA report](#) highlights additional solutions for non-recurrent traffic congestion based on examples of TIM programs in other jurisdictions. A key example is:

- **Freeway service patrol**, such as Florida's Road Rangers program and Maryland's Coordinated Highways Action Response Team (CHART). Freeways are routinely patrolled by personnel who are trained and equipped to perform minor repairs, assist motorists, remove debris, provide fuel, provide first aid, push vehicles out of travel lanes and assist emergency services. Such programs reduce incident duration and prevent secondary crashes, thus decreasing congestion. For every dollar spent, freeway patrol systems bring in \$6 to \$28. A similar program, the Highway 407 ETR Highway Safety Patrol is in place in Ontario on a smaller scale.⁹⁶

Ontario could therefore benefit from similar practices given the high traffic volume on its highways, especially in the Oxford County area. Approximately 60,000 trucks pass the 401/403 junction in Woodstock each day. Additionally, Drumbo/Innerkip Exit 250 is among the worst stretches on the 401 for accidents. Inspector Tony Hymers, Oxford OPP Detachment Commander, has articulated a need for an accident reporting centre in Oxford County, similar to those in the City of London, Chatham-Kent, and the Collision Reporting Centres of Toronto, which are used to report property damage-only accidents. This gets cars off the road quickly.⁹⁷

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Implement a proof-of-concept vetting program to create a pool of qualified towing companies that can be called to accidents, as well as an incentive program for contractors to clear accidents in 90 minutes or less. Test this program along the 401 from Oxford County to the westerly termination of the 401 in Windsor for 18 months and report on its effectiveness. If it proves to greatly reduce congestion, implement the program for all 400 series highways.

⁹⁵ Traffic Incident Management Quick Clearance Laws: A National Review of Best Practices, 2022, US Department of Transportation, https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop09005/role_relevance.htm; Traffic Incident Management. FHWA, https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/eto_tim_pse/about/tim.htm.

⁹⁶ Traffic Incident Management: Volume 1, 2018, CAA, <https://www.caa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/18-CAA-Infrastructure-Papers-TrafficIncidentMgmt-ENG-.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Traffic Services Collision Reporting Centres, Toronto Police Service, <https://www.torontopolice.on.ca/traffic/crc.php>; Collision Reporting, Chatham-Kent Police Service, <https://ckpolice.com/collision-reporting/>.

2. Create a proof-of-concept accident reporting centre in Oxford County covering the areas in Oxford along the 401 and 403. After 18 months report on its effectiveness. If it proves to be effective, establish reporting centres in jurisdictions along the 400 series highways.
3. Implement a temporary highway patrol service, through which roving vehicles patrol congested and high incident areas and provide direct service to motorists in distress, from Toronto to Waterloo Region along the 401 for 18 months and report on its effectiveness. If it proves to reduce congestion, implement the program permanently.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

31. Regional Approach to Provincial Procurement Reform

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Belleville Chamber of Commerce, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste Marie Chamber of Commerce, Timmins Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The Government of Ontario is in the process of setting up Supply Ontario, a centralized procurement model across the Ontario Public Service, and the broader public sector which may adversely impact small and medium-sized businesses and regional economic development across the province.

Background

Supply Ontario was established in November 2020 to address challenges in Ontario's supply chain system, including;

- barriers for small businesses to innovate and gain access to public sector procurements;
- a limited focus on the lowest price rather than on overall value, quality and impact; inconsistent customer service experiences, and;
- inefficiencies and duplication.

The government's goal of creating efficiencies through centralized procurement is well-intentioned. However, if not designed effectively, it risks leaving small and medium-sized businesses in small communities across the province unable to successfully bid on provincial contracts. Large province-wide contracts cannot effectively be fulfilled by regional suppliers, which could result in large contract awards being made only to national or multinational distributors, thereby damaging regional suppliers & economic development.

Rather than focusing on centralization at Queen's Park, regional hubs offer an alternate approach that concentrates on deriving the greatest total value and achieving savings objectives while also supporting regional economic development. Provincial initiatives to centralize procurement would be administered by regional hubs and through regionally awarded contracts with support by provincial/national agreements for commodities which are not tied to a regional supplier base. The procurement hubs would be established and administered within the regions they represent, enabling effective supplier/buyer relationship development to occur.

The government would mandate public buyers to use a blended portfolio of national, provincial, and regional suppliers to select a contract which derives the greatest "total value" for that agency where total value is defined as the balanced consideration of price, regional economic impact, and other important factors including but not limited to sustainability and cultural inclusion.

Positive models of this approach are demonstrated by the Lakehead Purchasing Consortium and other successful regional broader public service cooperatives, and provide proof that regional contract awards are as, or in some cases more effective than, singular large provincial agreements. As an example of the strength of regionalized procurement, the City of Thunder Bay recently closed a procurement for confidential waste paper shredding services where a local company provided a price lower than a provincial agreement. Bigger is not always better.

Investing in regional procurement hubs can also support investments in Indigenous businesses, which have long been neglected in Canada's economy. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce's report on regional economic

development, *The Great Mosaic*, recommends that the provincial government prioritize economic reconciliation with Indigenous communities. Part of the solution is to encourage more Indigenous involvement in provincial supply chains, either by incentivizing those with government contracts to include more Indigenous suppliers in their own supply chains, or by including Indigenous suppliers in those contracts directly.⁹⁸

Implementing a regional approach to procurement centralization with a focus on achieving the greatest total value provides opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses, Indigenous suppliers, and regional economic development.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Implement regional procurement hubs that mandate public buyers to use a blended portfolio of national, provincial, and regional suppliers to derive the greatest total value for purchases.
2. Define total value as the balanced consideration of price, regional economic impact, and other important factors including but not limited to sustainability and cultural inclusion.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

⁹⁸ “The Great Mosaic,” Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 2019, pg. 21.

32. Regional Transportation Fare Integration

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade, Toronto Region Board of Trade and Vaughan Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Newmarket Chamber of Commerce and Mississauga Board of Trade

Issue

Connectivity in modes of transit is essential to the success of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Regional Transit Plan. A crucial element of this connectivity is a one-card fare integration system for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

Although progress has been made in the process of fare integration, there is still more that must be done. To ensure a seamless transportation network, and to build further momentum across the wider region for fare integration, GO Transit needs to be integrated with the Toronto Transit Commission, Durham Region Transit, and other municipal transportation services. This issue must be addressed as soon as possible, to keep up with the needs of the growing population and visitors to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

Background

We applaud the federal, provincial and municipal governments for making their largest-ever investments to help fund transit infrastructure within the GTHA. The present transportation system is widely viewed as inadequate and traffic congestion is now a cross-regional issue that affects all municipalities and residents in the GTHA and beyond. The ability of businesses to move people and goods, of commuters to get to work and home, of visitors to travel in and through the GTHA, and the vitality of the regional economy are dependent upon an efficient regional transportation network. This is important to both the region and the province: GO Transit and the municipal transit agencies that connect to it serve two-thirds of Ontario's population (approximately 10 million people).

Network connectivity needs to be the backbone of the regional transportation plan; transfers between municipal transit systems should be easy and efficient. Connectivity must not stop at any particular municipal boundary; rather, it should be continuous throughout the GTHA and be based on an integrated fare system which incorporates "smart" card technology.

GO Transit and the nine municipal transportation agencies in the GTHA have already made progress on fare integration. Currently, GO Transit has signed co-fare agreements (allowing for discounting of fares when transferring from one transit agency to another) with eight municipal agencies. The PRESTO fare card allows users of more than one transit agency to get an immediate discount when they transfer between GO and one of the participating agencies. In addition, all the 905 transit operators (except Milton) have agreed to accept each other's transfers without additional fares.

While the TTC previously offered a co-fare funded by the provincial government, that discounted rate for PRESTO users expired in 2020.

To illustrate the cost implications to commuters: A trip from Rexdale in Etobicoke to Toronto's financial district is 26 KM and costs riders \$3.20, while a trip from Rexdale to an industrial job in Vaughan is only 4 KM, but costs riders \$7.08. From Markham and Steeles in North Scarborough to Union Station downtown takes about 92 minutes by bus and subway, or 52 minutes by bus and GO. Most still crowd onto the overloaded Yonge subway rather than using available space on the GO Train because the bus + subway fare is \$3.20 each way while the bus + GO fare is \$12.25.

The implementation of a regional fare integration system is integral to the creation of a sustainable, attractive and efficient transportation network. The benefits of the move to a smart card system will support the

development of further infrastructure and will make the regional transportation network more customer friendly, leading to greater use of the network and ultimately assisting in the alleviation of regional congestion and gridlock.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Through Metrolinx, implement a fully integrated fare system at the earliest possible opportunity for the GTHA regional transportation system including GO Transit and all municipal agencies, which will make for a more customer-friendly, seamless, and affordable transit network, and help alleviate wider-region traffic congestion and gridlock.
2. Facilitate the equitable distribution of fare dollars collected by an integrated fare system among the participating regional transit operators and Metrolinx.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

33. Simplify information sharing to improve specialized mental health care for people experiencing homelessness

Submitted by: The Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Sault Ste-Marie Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Commerce Brantford-Brant, Scugog Chamber of Commerce, Whitby Chamber of Commerce, Guelph Chamber of Commerce

Issue

There is a lack of integration among care professionals when caring for the complex mental health needs of people experiencing homelessness and experiencing acute mental health crises, leading to a disproportionate number of hospital emergency department visits, and an increase in preventable overdoses and deaths. The ‘circle of care’ model put forward by the Information and Privacy Commissioner does address information sharing for several health information custodians, but it fails to include two of the most common service providers involved in the case management of individuals experiencing homelessness with complex mental health needs: law enforcement and social services.

Background

Healthcare providers and community service providers must be able to collaborate to meet the unique mental health needs of people experiencing homelessness⁹⁹ in order to ensure stronger socioeconomic opportunities and safeguard health system capacity. The misapplication and restrictive nature of current privacy laws prevents the necessary and timely collaboration of professionals when addressing the ongoing and complex mental health needs of those experiencing homelessness. One intention of the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004* (PHIPA) is to provide practitioners with the right information at the right time. Without access to the full scope of information from all providers involved in an individual’s case management, emergency healthcare providers and emergency responders are unable to assess and tend to an individual’s needs effectively and appropriately.

This results in inadequate care for people experiencing homelessness and mental health and/or addictions challenges, which can lead to the continuation of those complex challenges. It also directly creates missed opportunities to adequately and more quickly address some of the individuals’ acute needs, effectively short-circuiting any chance to stabilize the person in a more timely fashion.

With growing rates of homelessness and mental health and addictions challenges in communities across the province, municipalities and local businesses are unable to manage the associated business, economic, and health system costs and impacts. For example, individuals experiencing homelessness make up a disproportionate share of Canadian emergency department visits in the absence of adequate and affordable housing and/or mental health supports.¹⁰⁰ This puts additional and unnecessary strain on our hospitals, healthcare resources, and the community at large. The lack of specialized mental health care for people experiencing homelessness is evident through the inability of all service providers to integrate specific case knowledge in the care planning process and through a system that fails to provide accessible care environments for all demographics. This lack of specialized care is also evident in the suboptimal discharge planning provided by hospitals and the justice systems (e.g., access to affordable housing, mental health and addictions supports, etc.) and the high rates of readmission among people experiencing homelessness.¹⁰¹ The direct impact to businesses is that these barriers to care are directly correlated to a slowing down of many individuals' pathways to becoming re-housed/re-integrated, posing significant, ongoing pressures on local communities, the health care system, and the economy more broadly.

⁹⁹ <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/s41572-020-00241-2.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-western-canada-the-growing-impact-of-homelessness-on-emergency/>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/s41572-020-00241-2.pdf>

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Review relevant sections of the Personal Health Information Protection Act that prevent sharing of information among service providers involved in clinical case management of people experiencing homelessness, specifically, non-healthcare related sector service providers such as social service and emergency service providers.
2. Ensure a provincial funding commitment to specialized mental health care for people experiencing homelessness.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

34. Strengthen Connectivity Between Businesses and Post-Secondary Institutions

This is a sunset resolution.

Submitted by: Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, Co-sponsored by: Brockville & District Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Ontario's businesses need skilled workers, including job-ready and experienced graduates with the right credentials and skills to match what employers need. The Government of Ontario supporting stronger linkages between post-secondary institutions and businesses, including direct training opportunities, will help ensure the supply of skilled employees meets the demand of businesses and in many cases, employers can offer jobs for students before they graduate, having "field tested" the talent through supported experiential learning in their workplace.

Background

Ensuring students in college and university receive hands-on learning opportunities while still attending school presents a huge advantage to both businesses and students, and the economy as a whole. It allows students to hit the ground running when they start work and businesses to take an active role in training and developing their future workforce.

Many SMEs perceive barriers to providing these experiential learning opportunities to students, such as, costs of student compensation and training and other administrative and operational requirements.

These barriers limit the number of opportunities for experiential learning to be gained, thereby limiting the potential for businesses to have access to the experienced talent they otherwise could.

On the one hand, businesses benefit from new post-secondary graduates being adaptable and prepared for the unknown jobs of the future, and armed with a skillset that includes critical thinking, problem solving, communication and teamwork. These skills help workers thrive in changing environments and are seen as critical to success in any business.

On the other hand, a post-secondary education that offers both rigorous academic programs and hands-on experiential learning¹⁰² has been proven to help develop the adaptable skills employers need. Eighty-six per cent of current students and recent graduates in Canada have said experiential learning led to an easier transition from post-secondary to a successful career.¹⁰³

While public and publicly assisted universities and colleges have developed vital services and programs to engage employers and students in experiential learning, providing an adequate supply of these opportunities to meet student demand is a continuing challenge.

That is why early and strong collaboration between public post-secondary institutions and business will help ensure students graduate with the skills necessary for today's employers and the jobs of tomorrow.

Increasing the supply of experiential learning opportunities is also an opportunity for small businesses. Small businesses make up 98 per cent of total businesses and two-thirds of private sector employment in Ontario.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Experiential learning is when students learn by doing, using their theoretical knowledge in practical, real-life, or work related situations. There are many types of experiential learning opportunities designed to give students practical skills, including co-ops, work placements and internships, as well as projects in which students work on finding solutions for employer or industry challenges.

¹⁰³ "Work Integrated Learning and Post-Secondary Education: What Students Think." Abacus Data, Fall 2016

¹⁰⁴ Statistics Canada. 2016. Key Small Business Statistics – June 2016.

http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03018.html#figure2-1-1.

Their involvement is particularly critical, as the SME category includes a growing number of start-ups arising from innovation and entrepreneurial activities across the province.

There is an opportunity for government to facilitate more linkages between small businesses and postsecondary institutions to create more hands-on learning opportunities for students.

This can be achieved by building upon existing programs that incentivize small businesses to hire students and recent graduates, as well as exploring new programs that encourage employers to work with universities and colleges to offer additional experiential learning initiatives.

There is also an opportunity for the government to prioritize the marketing of existing programs to employers to help raise awareness of these opportunities.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Explore new programs to incentivize greater employer participation in experiential learning initiatives, including, but not limited to, co-op education, paid work placements, internships, industry-recognized in-class projects, mentorship programs and incubators, accelerators and innovation hubs.
2. Expand the Co-operative Education Tax Credit.
3. Incentivize employers to hire graduates of co-operative education or equivalent programs by introducing a tax credit that allows employers to claim a percentage of wages and salaries for the first year of full-time employment.
4. Direct business-facing Ministries to prioritize communicating new and existing opportunities to support experiential learning opportunities and the associated benefits.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

35. Support for Metrolinx Big Move and ‘Next Wave’ Priority Projects

This is a sunseting resolution.

Submitted by: Richmond Hill Board of Trade. Co-sponsored by Vaughan Chamber of Commerce and Newmarket Chamber of Commerce.

Issue

Over the past 25 years, there has been tremendous population and business growth throughout the Greater Toronto – Hamilton Area (GTHA), particularly in the 905. In fact, York Region is now one of Canada’s fastest-growing large urban municipalities with nearly 1.2 million people, with a growth rate of 5.7% (Source: York Region). Notwithstanding the many positive results from urban intensification, increased traffic congestion typically accompanies population growth if infrastructure investments do not keep pace, as they have failed to do in the GTHA and beyond.

Starting 2025, Canada will welcome 500,000 new immigrants annually with ~50% of those immigrants settling in the GTHA (Source: IRCC). With the need for post-COVID working-from-home and inflationary pressures, immigrants and the mainstream population are looking to affordable larger living spaces. As a result, larger volumes of the population are looking at regions connected to Toronto for housing, work and business opportunities, resulting in the need for expanded transit infrastructure that connects the GTHA to York and other regions. The current lack of public transit options leads to less choice for commuters and ultimately increased vehicular traffic, which results in costs to business supply chains such as movement of goods delays.

The failure of our transportation infrastructure to keep pace in the face of unprecedented growth also affects tourists and visitors to the wider region and contributes to air pollution and carbon emissions. Recent investments by all levels of government in public transit, including the extension of the Toronto-York-Spadina subway extension to Vaughan and construction of VIVA-YRT bus rapidways, are welcomed additions to the transportation network in York Region. To maximize these investments in public transit infrastructure, support must be given for the Metrolinx Big Move transportation plan and ‘Next Wave’ priority projects including the construction acceleration of Yonge North Subway Extension.

Background

Transportation and transit infrastructure is critical to the success of our region, our province and our country. For that reason, we must focus on the bigger picture. Municipal boundaries act as transit boundaries that prevent effective movement of passengers. Transit policies and routes should be planned based upon population growth and need, not on municipal boundaries. York Region is one of the fastest growing areas in Canada contributing to some of the longest commute times in North America, with no subway line connecting York Region to the GTHA. To entice people to use public transportation and alleviate traffic congestion, the Yonge North Subway Extension is a top priority of the regional municipality of York and each of the nine municipal governments in York Region. In fact, transportation is the top local issue for the vast majority of York Region residents.

The Yonge subway extension will complement investments made in our existing transit network and help connect the GTHA by integrating with neighboring transit options. They will also maximize the recent investments in GO Transit, VIVA-YRT, Eglinton Crosstown LRT, UP Express connectivity to Pearson Airport, and the Toronto-York-Spadina Subway Extension. They will ensure for greater connectivity with surrounding communities.

Already included in the Metrolinx Big Move and identified as ‘Next Wave’ Priority Projects, developments of this magnitude will lead to new business and job creation, intensification, and the attraction of more affordable housing as well as significant environmental benefits. In fact, by eliminating the need for 2,500 bus trips that

currently service a stretch of Yonge Street each weekday, the Yonge North Subway Extension has significant potential to reduce carbon emissions and eliminate up to 28 tonnes of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions each day.

In June 2019, the Ontario government unveiled a new transit plan for the Greater Toronto Area which included several new subway projects such as the Yonge North Subway Extension. However, no significant construction milestones have commenced other than upgrades to the Finch station contract which was awarded in September 2022. The Metrolinx website does not specify any future project timelines beyond September 2022.

As populations continue to grow and densities rise throughout the GTHA and beyond, there is an urgent need to create connected infrastructure for future generations that ensures for the greatest range of mobility options. Projects of this size and scope require the financial support of all levels of government over an extended duration of time. The longer we wait, the more expensive projects of this magnitude become.

Recommendation

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, the Regional Municipality of York and the City of Toronto to:

1. Continue to prioritize construction for the Yonge North Subway Extension.
2. Maintain an open and transparent line of communication with the business community in the region with project information, status updates, construction timelines, and economic and environmental impacts with construction.
3. Maintain transparency by providing relevant information and project updates for *all other* Metrolinx projects currently underway in various municipalities.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The submitting chamber amended the resolution based on suggestions made by the Policy & Advocacy Committee. The committee supports the resolution as amended.

36. Support for the renewal of the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport Tripartite Agreement

Submitted by: Toronto Region Board of Trade

Issue

In 10 years, the Tripartite Agreement which governs the operation and existence of Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport will expire. As the province continues to recover from the pandemic, we need to double-down on our competitive advantages. The time is now to modernize and renew the agreement under which the airport operates to ensure Billy Bishop Airport can continue to offer connectivity that drives trade and tourism, facilitate vital support for provincial healthcare, create thousands of jobs, and embrace technology that will make the airport cleaner, greener and quieter in order to achieve climate change goals.

Background

Around the world, downtown airports like Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport support businesses, provide connectivity and unlock opportunities that make a city world class. These airports play an important role in the economy and are critical in building knowledge economies that rely heavily on the circulation of people and ideas.

Ontario is fortunate that its capital, Toronto, has one of the closest downtown airports in the world. Located roughly 3 km from the downtown core, Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport has a unique competitive advantage. It links Ontario to important economic and trade centres in eastern Canada and northeastern United States. With connections today to Windsor, Ottawa, Sault St. Marie, Timmins and Thunder Bay, the airport makes investment, trade, tourism, and development opportunities possible for businesses and workers in these communities and the communities around them.

Prior to COVID-19, Billy Bishop Airport supported the movement of nearly 3 million people, making it one of Canada's top 10 busiest airports and Ontario's 3rd busiest passenger airport. Additionally, its connectivity to the United States makes it the 5th busiest Canadian-U.S air border. This supports the movement of people and goods that result in a positive environment in Ontario for trade, investment, talent attraction and retention, as well as rebuilding the visitor economy.

The airport is a convenient, reliable, and valuable connection point that is strongly supported by the local community and overwhelmingly supported by the local business community for its role in unlocking bilateral trade and facilitating convenient travel for business and leisure. The airport has a bright future and is set to increase its value and impact for Toronto and Ontario's economy through the addition of US preclearance. This investment will:

- Increase economic opportunity with a net impact of C\$4.8 billion in annual GDP (up from \$2.1B in 2019), 32,400 jobs (up from 14,000 in 2019) and \$28M in monetized time savings for travelers and Canadian businesses;
- Generate an additional \$60 million in direct on-site tax revenues across federal, provincial, and municipal levels;
- Support Toronto's waterfront revitalization efforts, which will create approximately 40,000 new residences and 40,000 new jobs in the city;
- More generally, Ontario has an entrenched trade relationship with the United States. In fact, if Ontario were a country, it would be the U.S.'s third largest trading partner.

In addition to the economic benefits and value of the airport, it also has an important function connecting Ontarians to some of the best health care facilities and services. As the Toronto base for ORNGE, Ontario's air ambulance and medical transport, more than 3,600 life-saving flights were recorded in 2021.

In 10 years, Tripartite Agreement which governs the operation and existence of Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport will expire. As the province continues to recover from the pandemic, we need to identify, secure, and optimize our competitive advantages.

The time is now to modernize and renew the agreement under which the airport operates.

Recommendation

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Declare their support for Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport as a critical transportation link for Ontario and a key piece of infrastructure for the province's economic future, including by working with the City of Toronto, Government of Canada, and their counterparts to advance modernizing and renewing the Tripartite Agreement for the airport with urgency.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

37. Supporting Accurate Mapping Layers That Bolsters Reliable Broadband Accessibility for Ontarians

Submitted by: Paris and District Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Timmins Chamber of Commerce, Peterborough and Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce, Huron Chamber of Commerce, Leamington District Chamber of Commerce and Simcoe and District Chamber of Commerce

Issue

The importance of high-speed broadband to residents is self-evident and the necessity of accurate broadband mapping information is critical to ensuring all residents receive high-speed service. The Provincial Government has committed to providing high speed internet of 50 Mbps/10 Mbps to all premises by the end of 2025, and funding is being provided to internet service providers (ISP) towards achieving this goal. Municipalities have a responsibility to ensure taxpayer funds allocated to this task are spent efficiently so identifying the areas that are currently unserved or underserved will help to direct resources and build out the infrastructure needed to support the work being done by the ISPs.

The United States government has directed all internet service providers in the USA to provide accurate mapping information twice a year to the FCC for public viewing via the Broadband DATA Act.

Background

The Federal and Provincial governments have been gathering mapping information from internet service providers and the Federal Government recently updated the ISED mapping data to provide a more accurate picture of the locations of ISP services.

The current mapping information provided is done in a hexagonal pattern with each hexagon representing an approximate geographic area of 25 square kilometres. More granular data of serviced areas is displayed on the "Rural Road Coverage" layer, but only once the user has zoomed to or beyond "level 11". The current average user may not understand this needs to be done and could miss the benefit from this more accurate information layer. There is also a lack of transparency as to where this data comes from. Although it is shown that service is available at a specific location, there is no way to learn which ISP(s) the "Rural Road Coverage" data represents. Users would have to engage all of the ISPs listed in their area in order to discover which one(s) service their specific location.

ISED currently only accepts data from larger internet service providers so smaller providers, which tend to operate in more rural and remote areas, are not necessarily reflected in the mapping data.

Businesses are reluctant to locate in more rural areas due to the lack of, or slow internet, and residents are considering moving for the simple fact that their broadband cannot keep up with their employment needs and their kids' schooling requirements.

In July 2021, The United Nations Human Rights Council proposed a resolution, which included a sponsorship from Canada, that supported an addition to Article 19, which declared access to the internet as a catalyst for the enjoyment of human rights, most notably, the right to freedom of expression.¹⁰⁵

If reliable, affordable access to broadband technology continues to dampen economic prosperity in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, then the Provincial Government, in partnership with the Ontario

¹⁰⁵ Article 19: <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-hrc-maintains-consensus-on-internet-resolution/>

Municipalities, must look to require better asset mapping information from the private sector to encourage the expansion of broadband infrastructure.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario:

1. To ensure that all Ontarians have equitable access to reliable broadband connectivity at competitive rates by:
 - a. Working with the Federal Government to provide municipalities with accurate mapping layers that represents and provides a level playing field and equitable opportunities to ALL ISP services.
 - b. Is provided in a format that is user friendly, and whose sources of data are transparent and informed with best available information.
 - c. allows municipalities the option (if so desired) to extract the granular data relevant to their region and incorporate it into their own mapping resource.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

38. Supporting Ontario Contractors and Expediting Infrastructure Builds by Addressing the Backlog of Ontario One Call Locate Requests Through Adaptive Technological Innovation

Submitted by: Timmins Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, Branford-Brandt Chamber of Commerce, Windsor-Essex Chamber of Commerce, North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce

Issue

For any excavating of a new building, repairing buried infrastructure, landscaping, residential paving, building concrete slabs, or anything else that requires you to break ground, you must contact Ontario One Call at a minimum of five (5) days prior to your excavation.¹⁰⁶ However, contractors and developers who submit a locate request through Ontario One Call are being subjected to up to a three (3) month wait time to have a locate come and do the initial assessment process to allow the dig to move ahead, which is currently one of three steps. The backlog of locate submissions to Ontario One Call has further compounded the already growing barriers to completing projects on time—including workforce shortages, permitting and planning delays, which hinder our region's ability to remain competitive.

Background

The Ontario One Call system is the primary method for identifying underground infrastructure prior to excavation and is essential for protecting public safety and maintaining the integrity of essential services. The backlog of locate requests in the Ontario One Call system has grown to unacceptable levels, causing delays and increasing the risk of damage to underground infrastructure and potential harm to the public. Uniquely, Northern Ontario has a very narrow window of opportunity to complete critical infrastructure projects vital to our region's economic growth and development, given our short summer season. Furthermore, the massive financial burden these delays bring to our firms can heavily impact the outcome of the project and our community's ability to encourage new investment in the future.

It was encouraging to see the passing of Bill 93: Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022. The legislation facilitates major changes to how locates are delivered in Ontario, including a much broader use of Dedicated Locator services. It supports several operational improvements meant to remove barriers to timely locate delivery. The legislation also improves and streamlines the compliance system, enhancing Ontario One Call's powers in this area. However, the challenge with the five-day turnaround exists not through legislation but in a lack of human resources to facilitate to a short window. In the ever-growing workforce deficit that does not discriminate by sector, the Province must consider how p3 partnerships or automation can fill in the gaps.

A city in British Columbia has recently adopted automation to resolve the locates shortages that provide tangible cost and time-saving measures. The City of Burnaby has been recognized with the Municipal Information Systems Association BC's Spirit of Innovation award for successfully automating its BC 1 Call "Dial Before You Dig" process, providing faster, 24-hour service to customers while saving staff time and money. Burnaby received over 10,000 requests through BC 1 Call in 2021, a vital resource for contractors and homeowners which provides schematic information on underground utilities prior to breaking ground on construction and renovation projects. By automating this service, the City expects to save an estimated \$500,000 over a 5-year period while freeing up staff to work on other important projects.

¹⁰⁶ Contractors. Ontario One Call. (n.d.). Retrieved July 19, 2022, from <https://www.ontarioonecall.ca/contractors/>

Before automating this service, each request took approximately 15 minutes of staff time to process. Now, callers are provided with information within 3 to 5 minutes, and the service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Recently, Premier Doug Ford noted that Ontario doesn't have to reinvent the wheel and that we can look to other successful sub-sovereign nations and municipalities that have found innovative solutions to backlogs and challenges. In the case of the ongoing backlogs from Ontario One Call, it is prudent that the Government of Ontario looks to models that can be scaled for use in the Province while leveraging the private sector.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Work with Ontario One Call to address the severe accumulation of requests for locates and consider how partnerships with independent contractors who can provide locate services can assist in moving these projects forward in a mutually beneficial way to all involved.
2. Explore ways in which adaptive and innovative technology, including the use of augmented reality and algorithmic-based response systems, further expedite infrastructure projects like what the City of Burnaby, British Columbia, has implemented.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

39. Supporting Ontario Craft Beverage Alcohol Producers By Updating AGCO Liquor License Rules

Submitted by: Hamilton Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Guelph Chamber of Commerce

Issue

A series of recent Alcohol & Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) changes to the liquor control act have facilitated more opportunities for Ontario breweries, wineries, distilleries and cideries to reach customers than ever before. Largely in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic with an interest in facilitating local diversification of alcohol distribution outlets, the Ontario government has instituted a series of changes that now permit all Ontario liquor license holders the ability to sell to-go or take- out alcohol.

This has created a significant opportunity for growth for Ontario craft beverage producers that may have previously had limited exposure to audiences beyond their local geography. However, there remains uncertainty around the legal functioning and requirements for to-go alcohol sales, particularly from the perspective of the variety of types of organizations that hold liquor licenses in the absence of a formal update to the licensing regime.

Liquor license holders can vary from alcohol producers themselves, to restaurants and bars, and to small retail operations. These operators are often subject to varying rules across jurisdictions, and Ontario craft beverage producers currently are forced to navigate the various rules unique to each jurisdiction they wish to sell their products in. There is a need for uniform provisions across the province that would simplify compliance for all liquor license holders and Ontario craft beverage producers alike.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered Ontarians' lives in permanent ways as all levels of government were forced to adopt rules and regulations across sectors of our economy to accommodate pandemic-related operating restrictions and respond to a potentially disastrous economic climate. There are dozens of examples of governments adapting existing legislation to permit the functioning and survival of many Ontario-based businesses at the peak of the pandemic, and many of these changes have been good for the long-term health of our economy.

One such series of policy changes pertaining to alcohol distribution in Ontario may seem minor at first glance but have in fact significantly altered the economic landscape for alcohol retailers and producers alike, creating new opportunities to access more customers than ever before. However, these changes are not without their challenges, and it is time that the provincial government evaluate these policy changes to further support the Ontario craft beverage industry and small retailers alike.

Historically, Ontario has one of the most centralized, borderline monopolistic alcohol distribution frameworks in the country. The model dates to the prohibition era where alcohol distribution was tightly regulated and relegated to LCBOs and Brewers Retail/The Beer Store. This was in response to the perceived need to control the consumption of alcohol as much as possible and to limit its negative societal impacts. In doing so, the government established a rigid policy framework that limited alcohol availability, consumer options, means of distribution, and overall accessibility to the public. Over several decades, Ontario's alcohol distribution model remained largely unchanged, despite changing public opinions and perceptions over the use of alcohol and the government's authority over its use. The negative health impacts of alcohol overconsumption are not to be ignored, but most users do so in a recreational and non-harmful manner.

When COVID-19 struck Ontario and our province entered a lockdown, the provincial government had to quickly adapt operating rules and procedures for nearly all sectors of our economy. This was done in a rapid-fire manner and often in iterations, tinkering with policy based on experiences, to land on the best option that would preserve public health and safety, while still creating enabling conditions for private enterprise to operate

and prosper. For the hospitality and alcohol beverage industries, these included significant changes to the Liquor Control Act that now permitted to-go alcohol sales for restaurants, bars, and other small retailers for the first time in the history of the province of Ontario.

This was seen as a major boon to both the hospitality and alcohol beverage industries, finally liberalizing nearly one hundred-year-old policies that significantly restricted not only access to alcohol for consumers, but also access to market share for alcohol producers. Now, rather than be subject to extensive lines and limited operating hours at LCBO and Beer Store locations, consumers had the option to purchase alcohol directly from their favourite restaurants or through newly established retail bottle shops. Simultaneously, this change created a major opportunity for Ontario craft beverage producers – whether they be a brewery, winery, distillery, or cidery – to access new customers via new channels that the previous model focused on listings in LCBOs and Beer Stores could not provide.

While the LCBO and Beer Store remain the primary source of alcohol for most Ontarians, it can be very difficult, expensive and competitive to be listed at those retailers. Moreover, there's not a guarantee that your large order listing will sell, creating significant risk and reward decisions for small to medium-sized craft alcohol beverage producers. By permitting alcohol sales through new channels, the provincial government made it easier than ever for small to medium-sized craft alcohol beverage producers to list their products at potentially hundreds of outlets across the province, with a significantly lower risk, focusing on lower inventory numbers and rapid sales reporting between the producers and retailers.

Now, residents in Hamilton can go to their local licensed retail shop or order from their favourite restaurant and have access to a unique selection of craft alcohol beverage products from across Ontario that are otherwise unlisted at traditional alcohol retailers. These changes have created new opportunities for Ontario craft breweries, wineries, distilleries and cideries to get their products to market in a fairer manner and have created significant economic opportunities for these operators that were previously unavailable to them.

With these changes, however, have come some challenges. Primarily, given the relatively recent changes to alcohol distribution options and the lack of detail within those legislative provisions, hospitality operators, retail bottle shop operators, and beverage alcohol producers are reporting a diversity of experiences when it comes to enforcement and application of the legislation by law enforcement. There seems to be multiple interpretations of the rules among agents enforcing the regulations under the Liquor Control Act between jurisdictions that have complicated an otherwise rich opportunity for all parties involved. This creates uncertainty in the market when there are competing interpretations of the legislation and in fact serves to undermine the economic opportunity created by legislation in the first place. Where craft beverage alcohol producers quickly realized market growth through the liberalization of alcohol distribution, it was pulled from under their feet when enforcement agencies began to interpret legislation in different ways, creating dozens of different interpretations of rules and regulations between jurisdictions, complicating their ability to sell their products to new markets across the province.

While the legislative changes to permit more diverse options for purchasing Ontario craft beverage alcohol are welcome, it is time for the provincial government to evaluate these changes and measure their successes and shortcomings. The provincial government ought to conduct a review of these changes with a lens of understanding the varying experiences between jurisdictions, with enforcement of the rules with a goal of creating a unified approach to enforcement and application of these Ontario liquor license new rules. A comprehensive review for to-go alcohol sales ought to be explored, creating certainty for those selling alcohol to-go about the application of its rules and to provide clarity to those producing beverage alcohol products, with an eye to getting their products to market in a fairer manner than historically seen in Ontario.

This evaluation and ultimate policy implementation will create a more stable market for all hospitality and retail businesses interested in to-go alcohol sales, support local Ontario businesses, diversify consumer options, and help to support main street economies.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Consult with Ontario craft beverage alcohol producers, hospitality establishments and licensed retail operators to document the varying application of applicable rules under the AGCO between jurisdictions and the experiences of each, with an eye to;
2. Inform the development of a province-wide liquor licensing review that would provide clarity to local enforcement agencies, hospitality operators, retail operators, and Ontario craft beverage producers interested in selling their products in outlets across the province.
3. Build into any new legislation an evaluation mechanism that would require a review of the performance of the licensing regime every three to five years with an eye for both economic and social performance monitoring.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

40. Supporting Safer and Healthier communities through a Detox Centre in a collaborative approach when dealing with those experiencing Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions

Submitted by: Belleville Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Brockville & District Chamber of Commerce, Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Across Canada over the past five years, most communities have seen a significant increase in the number of community members experiencing homelessness, mental health and addictions. While not intrinsically connected, there is a direct correlation between homelessness, mental health and addictions. While there are many social service agencies doing their best to work with these affected community members, a missing element in a small to mid-sized community is the support to operate a Detox Centre in an effort to address the addictions component of a triangle that encompasses homelessness, mental health and addictions.

Background

Currently in Canada it is estimated that as many as 6 million people, or 21% of our population, will meet the criteria for substance use disorder in their lifetime. When we look at some of the larger municipalities across our country, they have the resources available to support a Detox Centre. Ottawa has a Detox Centre program that enlists the support of the Montfort Hospital for the health and safety of their clients. It is imperative to address these socioeconomic challenges through an integrated three-pronged approach, including addressing homelessness via the use of short- and long-term solutions (e.g., shelters, supportive housing, affordable housing, etc.), a transition centre and other dedicated services and supports to address the mental health concerns of the clients, and last but not least, the most important element is a Detox Centre to provide wrap around services for clients who are suffering from alcohol and/or drug addictions.

According to the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, 35,000 Canadians experience homelessness on any given night. At least 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness in a year and 27% are female while 19% are youth. Additionally, the number of adults 55+ years old experiencing homelessness is rising, a combined 24% of shelter users.

In 1988 Robert Graham developed a document called “Building Community Support for People.” This was a plan for mental health in Ontario that included the closure of mental health facilities across Ontario (i.e.: Mountainview & Burritts Rapids along with others). The Graham report highlighted the importance of reintegrating those with mental health challenges in our communities across Ontario. The reintegration of these members of our community was to be supported through social support mechanisms that did not materialize, thus leaving the municipalities to deal with the social support challenges of the reintegration.

With growing rates of homelessness and mental health and addictions challenges in communities across the province, municipalities and local businesses are unable to manage the associated business, economic, and health system costs. This is not a criminal problem but a health care issue that can no longer be managed within a system already stretched beyond capacity.

It is time for the provincial government to support our most vulnerable populations with the support promised the well-intentioned reintegration that not only costs municipalities, but the businesses serving these communities.

It is also critical to note that the establishment of a detox centre in a select community will exacerbate the problem where these resources are located; the request is to consider the creation of these centres in multiple communities across Ontario.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Facilitate the creation of Detox Centres in mid-sized communities across Ontario without existing facilities.
2. Develop a framework to allow for sustained funding agreements with parameters to ensure the viability and success of the Detox Centre.
3. Ensure that Detox Centres are provided with mental health and housing resources and integrated with mental health care providers and homeless shelters.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The submitting chamber amended the resolution based on suggestions made by the Policy & Advocacy Committee. The committee supports the resolution as amended.

41. Tax Rebates for Home Care

Submitted by: Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce, Belleville Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Receiving healthcare at home is the preferred route for most people where feasible, saving both them and the government money, compared to staying in institutions. However, upfront capital costs are a major barrier to home care. Lack of access to a hospital bed and patient lift limit peoples' access to home care.

Background

Our population is quickly getting older. The Government of Canada's Action for Seniors report states one in seven Canadians were seniors in 2021 with that number expected to jump to 1 in 4 by 2030. The Canadian Institute for Health Information is predicting a 68% increase in Canada's senior population from 2017 to 2037, accounting for 10.4 million people.

When it comes to aging, most Canadians want to stay in their own homes as long as it is feasible. The same goes for those with ongoing healthcare needs due to illness or injury.

The National Home Modifications Survey, commissioned by March of Dimes Canada in April 2021, found 78% of Canadians want to age in their current homes, but only 26% predict they'll be able to do so. The survey found 50% of adults and seniors identified costs of home modifications as a barrier.

For many, the decision to move into long-term care is complicated, even if it's the best way to meet their healthcare needs. The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) estimates some 40,000 Canadians were on waitlists for nursing homes at any given time in 2019. Meanwhile, they estimated a further 430,000 Canadians have unmet homecare needs. The NIA estimates 22% of people currently in nursing homes would be better served at home with the appropriate support.

Our municipal, provincial and federal governments spend billions of dollars every year on assisting people with long-term healthcare needs with the majority going to long-term care homes and subsidies for institutional care. The NIA estimates that in 2018, public spending on long-term care in Canada included \$20 billion for nursing home care and \$4 billion for home and community-based care.

Most Canadians in need of regular healthcare are getting it at home whether by choice or lack of available institutional space. Some require a moderate level of support while others need several hours of daily care. Regardless, the costs are cheaper for care at home than in an institution.

Based on a 2011 study, Home Care Ontario estimates that the costs for care is \$842/day for a hospital bed, \$126/day for a long-term care bed, and \$42/ day for home care.

Home care allows Ontarians to get the care they want at a much lower cost to the public and, depending on the subsidies they are eligible for, a lower cost to themselves.

Receiving care at home has challenges and significant expenses. Many people's homes need renovations and special equipment from beds to lifts. There are costs for private services, including medical care, housekeeping, transportation, physical therapy, cooking, and personal care. The role of family caregivers can only offer so much and is dependant on a senior's family situation.

Home Care Ontario found that families fund more than 20 million hours of home care annually for 150,000 people at an average cost of \$17,600 per year per family.

People with mobility challenges have a major barrier to home care if they do not have a hospital bed and patient lift. Due to the risk of injury in lifting patients out of bed, some home care providers will not provide services to people without adequate lifting devices.

Some people would be able to look after themselves for routine tasks but end up bed ridden for most of the day due to lack of a hospital bed and patient lift. They may be limited to being mobile only while the homecare worker is on site due to challenges getting in and out of bed.

The Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit does provide incentives for hospital beds and other homecare needs, but at \$1,500 the amount is not enough for all of the services it aims to assist with and is only available to residents age 70 and older. While seniors are a large part of the home care demographic, there are many younger Canadians with long-term healthcare needs.

Offering subsidies to receive care at home will save Ontarians money when it comes to healthcare spending and relieve pressure on our overburdened healthcare system.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Create a one-time refundable \$10,000 tax credit toward special medical equipment and renovations, including hospital beds and patient lifts, for people of all ages requiring home care services.
2. Expand funding for virtual home monitoring programs through Ontario Health Teams and other health care providers, to help seniors live safely in their homes and reduce the burden on the hospital system.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

42. The Workforce Ontario Needs

Submitted by: Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: The Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce, Quinte West Chamber of Commerce & Belleville Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Our work and its environment have changed rapidly. From technological innovations, demographic shifts and working from home, we adapted. The skills development environment remains under pressure. We must continue to help people facing labour market disruptions and cycles of unemployment or underemployment, and to help businesses and organizations access talent with the skills needed to succeed.

Background

The previous 36 months sent shocks through labour market. What this did was amplify existing trends and transformations affecting the future of work in Ontario. Job polarization is one of several trends — including automation, offshoring and the growing importance of the gig-economy — that were already of general interest prior to March 2020. As Chamber leaders, we must consider how to assist in continuing to build back the economy.

On the positive front, we Ontarians are facing new opportunities and challenges that require new skills. Many sectors are already facing talent gaps, with 64% of Canadian entrepreneurs reporting that labour shortages are limiting their growth.¹⁰⁷ Yet, workers in other sectors are facing high levels of unemployment and many individuals are keen to transition to new roles, with 43% of working Canadians reporting that they will likely look for a new job in the coming year.¹⁰⁸

It's clear that employers are struggling to find the right talent at the same time that people are struggling to find the right opportunities. These conflicting trends are indicative of a broader skills mismatch in Ontario.¹⁰⁹ The size of this mismatch can have an enormous economic impact – the Conference Board of Canada estimates that the unrealized value of skills vacancies in the Canadian economy hit \$25 billion in 2020.¹¹⁰

Ontario needs a robust and responsive skills development ecosystem that helps people enter meaningful jobs, advance in their chosen careers, and transition to new occupations when needed.

As it stands, Ontario's skills development ecosystem is not ready. In general, Canada is a leader in providing high-quality K-12 and post-secondary education but has been a laggard in workplace training and lifelong learning.¹¹¹

New challenges require a system that is much better able to support Ontarians by providing ongoing, flexible education and training that helps them navigate the changing labour market.

¹⁰⁷ Business Development Bank of Canada, 2021, "Labour Shortage is limiting the growth of most Canadian businesses: BDC study," <https://www.bdc.ca/en/about/mediaroom/news-releases/labour-shortage-study>.

¹⁰⁸ Newswire, 2021, "Study reveals that Almost Half of Canadian Employees are Considering Switching Jobs in 2022," <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/study-reveals-that-almost-half-of-canadian-employees-are-considering-switching-jobs-in-2022-849994150.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Sullivan, K., 2017, "Talent in Transition: Addressing the Skills Mismatch in Ontario," <https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/Talent-in-Transition.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Gabler, N., Gormley, B., 2022, "Lost Opportunities: Measuring the Unrealized Value of Skill Vacancies in Canada," <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/lost-opportunities-measuring-the-unrealized-value-of-skill-vacancies-in-canada/>.

¹¹¹ Munro, D., 2019, "Skills, Training and Lifelong Learning," <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SkillsTrainingAndLifelongLearning-PPF-MARCH2019-EN.pdf>.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Expand employment opportunities for international students by broadening the scope of study permits and introducing fast-tracked visa streams for specialized academic programs targeting fields facing labour shortages.
2. Provide technology skills training to adapt an aging workforce to the changing labour market and encourage life-long learning.
3. Enable the seamless transfer of foreign professional credentials held by immigrants to enable their participation in the Canadian labour force.
4. Provide post-secondary institutions with incentive to enhance recruitment towards the skilled trades that are currently experiencing labour shortages.

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The committee supports this resolution.

43. Zoning preservation of Crucial Employment (Manufacturing, Retail and Warehousing) Lands

Submitted by: Niagara Falls Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by: Fort Erie Chamber of Commerce, Port Colborne-Wainfleet Chamber of Commerce, Welland/Pelham Chamber of Commerce, Grimsby Chamber of Commerce, Niagara Board of Trade and Commerce, and Lincoln Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Preservation of Employment Lands.

Background

Maintaining Employment Lands that allow for the sustainable expansion of the jobs-producing, broader industrial sector, is essential in preserving Ontario's economy and job growth.

The Niagara Falls Chamber of Commerce recognizes and supports current provincial priorities to provide more residential areas for the province's rapidly growing population. We, and our partners in this resolution, also insist that lands zoned for residential, and Employment Lands must co-exist.

Commercial and industrial lands, dedicated by municipal zoning, allow for Ontario's residents to access the stable jobs they need, to thrive and prosper where they live.

We recognize the pressure to alternatively develop (these usually-serviced lands) for residential purposes, noting the pre-existing services are also intended for new Employment Lands development.

However, as legislation and pressures mount to reduce residential development charges, industrial lands provide a reliable source for ongoing development charges, jobs and tax revenue for the municipal tax base.

Tax revenue and charges from already-serviced Employment Lands help mitigate increasing budget-pressures that are steadily pushing up property taxes and affecting associated rent increases. Future Employment Lands-generated wealth will allow local governments to maintain the services and essential infrastructure needed for hundreds of thousands of new residents.

In recent decades, there has been wide agreement among Niagara's municipal government and stakeholders like the Niagara Industrial Association about the urgency in securing Employment Lands.

Indeed Niagara Region, and lower-tier municipalities that include Niagara Falls, are aware of the essential nature of Employment Lands and Areas in assuring prosperity for all residents.

The region has a thriving industrial/commercial sector in Niagara Falls and across the Peninsula, which is reflected in its Niagara Gateway Economic Zone and Centre Community Improvement Plan (Gateway CIP). It notes that in 2022, the Niagara had \$534 million in non-residential building construction.

Niagara Region's new Official Plan also identifies and protects the Employment Areas for a range of employment uses, including heavy industrial, light industrial, and knowledge and innovation industries. This Employment Lands future security is essential as developable lands become increasingly scarce in this area, and other parts of Ontario, restricted in development by the Greenbelt and other measures.

The November 2022 notice of approval of the Niagara Region Official Plan also references helping the Region prepare for an anticipated population of 694,000 people and 272,000 jobs, by 2051. "Clearly defining and mapping Niagara's employment areas will help direct investment to those areas, attracting and retaining jobs, and growing Niagara's economy," says a summary.

The Niagara Industrial Association has also steadfastly advocated for the preservation of Employment Lands: Its members alone, provide more than 6,000 typically well-paying and stable jobs, producing a total manufacturing revenue of \$1.3 billion in its most recent calculation.

The stakeholder voices from Niagara and elsewhere in Ontario are clear. We must have protected Employment Lands zoning that exist cooperatively alongside rapid residential development. Employment Lands have to be properly preserved for future investment and growth, with zone changes correspondingly restricted by the Province of Ontario.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Define the need for critical employment lands in official plans while maintaining and protecting the existing volume of employment lands in the pursuit of residential zoning.
2. Ensure the Ontario Land Tribunal protects employment lands through its appeals process.
3. Recognize these lands must sustainably co-exist alongside other community zoning purposes. Employment Lands serve as a future jobs-creating and municipal-revenue complement to new residential developments coming onstream soon — given explicit government priorities to build needed new homes, and residences.

References

Job-Producing Lands Release, Niagara Industrial Association, <https://niagaraindustry.com/niagaras-job-producing-lands-must-coexist-with-new-housing-nia-official-press-release/>

Niagara Employment Area Strategy, [Report - Niagara Region's Employment Area Strategy: Background Report and Recommendations](#)

Niagara Industrial Association, <https://niagaraindustry.com/>

Niagara Region Gateway CIP, <https://niagaracanada.com/incentives-and-programs/gateway-cip/>

OCC Policy & Advocacy Committee Position: The submitting chamber amended the resolution based on suggestions made by the Policy & Advocacy Committee. The committee supports the resolution as amended.