



July 13, 2020

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020 and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on Municipalities, Construction and Building sectors of the economy.

Written submission in support of oral presentation by:

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About the Town of Renfrew:

We are a strong vibrant community, located along the Hwy #17 transportation route to northern Ontario and the gateway to western Canada. The Town of Renfrew was founded on the forestry industry through the success of the lumber barons of the 1800's. Over the years, the Town has moved from a resource-based economy to a diversified regional economy. With an established, vibrant downtown offering a good mix of retail and services; a manufacturing base and a regional health centre – Renfrew is building for the future. Renfrew's quality of life is exceptional and within easy access to Canada's capital. See Quick Fact Sheet attached.

On March 17, 2020, the Government of Ontario, faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, announced decisive action to protect the health and safety of all individuals and families by making an order declaring an emergency under s 7.0.1 (1) the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*.

Protecting the citizens of this great province, while paramount, has come at a significant socio-economic cost. COVID-19 has shut down entire sectors of the economy, left millions out of work and facing financial hardship, and has had a profound impact on every community and the municipal governments that serve them. Municipalities are facing unprecedented financial challenges at a time when residents are relying on its services more than ever.

There is light at the end of the tunnel however, and through the leadership of the Government of Ontario we are started on the path to recovery. Municipalities have an important part to play in this recovery and are ready to step up to the challenges ahead.

As the Government considers economic stimulus to boost the province's recovery, investment in infrastructure will need to play a key role. All three levels of government must show confidence in their communities and lead through investment in long-standing community assets. Investing in and developing inclusive community assets indicate a confidence in our future and our people.

Proposed Actions:

The following are important targeted actions that the Ontario Government can take to ensure that municipalities can continue to effectively serve their communities:

- 1. Provide immediate funding to municipalities with shovel-ready projects, kick-starting the provincial and local economies, putting people back to work and stimulating local spending.**

Town of Renfrew Examples:

Expansion of Recreational Facility and creation of Cultural Centre:

Our community has submitted an application for project funding under the **Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) - Community, Culture and Recreation stream** and have long-awaited a decision on this application. Our project is shovel-ready and we can proceed immediately upon notification of funding. Previously, our Town, with the benefit of community consultation and the support of our neighbouring municipalities, had designed the building and tendered the project. We then held off as an exciting new partnership presented itself and we redesigned to accommodate the much needed and important **Bonnechere Algonquin First Nation Indigenous Cultural Centre. This partnership is a first for this region and will nurture bi-cultural awareness through the sharing of traditions, customs, values, spirituality and the life-sustaining resources of the land.** Our relationship with our Algonquin friends is a long-standing one and this project highlights the importance of showcasing their culture, and guarantees them a high profile location in our community. An immediate start to construction will allow the building to be enclosed and provide needed employment during the upcoming winter months.

The commitment of the Town of Renfrew and that of our neighbouring municipalities has created a project that will see the creation of a community hub that provides a central access point for a range of much needed health, cultural, recreational, and green spaces to nourish community life.

Munroe Avenue / Harry Street Reconstruction Project:

The proposed benefits of this this shovel-ready \$2.8M project are:

- improved safety for motorists, users of active transportation, and pedestrians through reconstruction of road and sidewalk infrastructure;
- reduced frequency of untreated sewage by-passes at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and reduced infiltration of groundwater through replacement of sanitary sewers;
- separation of storm and sanitary streams from installing new storm sewers;
- replaces old asbestos cement watermains and renews asset; and
- improved water quality in the Bonnechere River.

Currently, the Town is the only significant payroll or activity in our community with ready to start projects which can kick-start our economy and assist the economies of our smaller neighbouring municipalities.

Investment in infrastructure at a local level is appreciated even more when analyzing the true impact on the municipalities it serves. Using the aforementioned *Expansion of Recreational Facility and creation of Cultural Centre* project as an example, this community project, in partnership with Bonnechere Algonquin First Nation, is valued at nearly \$16.5 million and will generate 30 FTE positions for 18 months, with the following distribution to identified sectors:

Sector	Hours
Apprenticeship	7,488
Women	12,480
Persons with Disabilities	120
Veterans	6,240
Recent Immigrants	3,120
First Nation	13,104
Total	42,552

Note: Youth will account for 35% of these identified hours.

The facility when constructed will generate an additional 30 people on site as it becomes an employment hub as well as a cultural, recreational, health and spiritual hub. It will support approximately \$1.2 million in annual employment income, comprised of approximately 42 full-time and 18 part-time positions. For comparison, the Town of Renfrew has an annual payroll of a little over \$5 million with approximately 90 employees. This project will be a significant and consistent generator of employment in our community and a site which is likely to attract other employers and investment to the site.

2. Municipalities need a more pragmatic approach to financial sustainability. We need a new relationship with the Provincial Government and the ability to share in the Province's prosperity and growth more equitably.

The operating cost of new infrastructure and rising asset management costs cannot be sustained when the appetite for property tax increases top out at the 2-3% per year range; with this tax burden being placed more and more upon the residential sector. While continued municipal asset management planning will help municipalities prepare long-term infrastructure financing plans and make good investment decisions for their residents, we'll need a continuation of dedicated, long-term, sustainable infrastructure funding programs from the federal and provincial governments.

The Town of Renfrew, while very pleased to hear the Ontario Government's recent announcement to move forward with the first stage of widening Highway 17 from two to four lanes between Arnprior and Renfrew, understands the importance of readiness and portraying community confidence in attracting new investment.

Rural and northern Ontario communities that have had historically low or no growth makes them increasingly dependent on transfer payments, and so long-term and reliable programs like the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF) are so very important.

Raising property taxes is not a viable solution to address Ontario's infrastructure gap and the government should ensure sustainable infrastructure investment as a funding priority moving forward.

3. Continued support of small businesses and manufacturers

The Province's recently announced proposed legislation, the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020*, is a positive step forward in getting Ontario back to business.

In a municipality like the Town of Renfrew, small businesses are so vitally important to our local economy. They provide opportunities for entrepreneurs, create meaningful jobs keeping money close to home, and support neighborhoods and communities. In addition they fuel innovation and always have the opportunity to grow into even larger economic generators. Government can assist in helping small business not only survive but thrive, by ensuring that programs exist which promote economic development, loan guarantees, research and development, infrastructure improvement and education and training.

While COVID-19 has severely impacted, and in some cases decimated, certain sectors, it has also spawned new ideas and business opportunities, and has caused permanent changes that are sure to influence how governments wish to direct recovery stimulus. This may include efforts to encourage the back-shoring of manufacturers that have long since left our communities.

With every difficulty there comes opportunity, and the ongoing pandemic is challenging previous ways of thinking and forcing us to look at innovative ways to rebuild the economy. Investing in business, people and projects is what we need.

4. Improving upon Ontario's broadband action plan to ensure that high-speed broadband connectivity is available to everyone.

Lack of acceptable broadband service for, primarily, rural populations, just can't be ignored. COVID-19 has demonstrated that Ontarians in all communities depend on digital access. As communities around the Province try to adapt, broadband connectivity and access are more critical to our lives and livelihoods than ever before. It has become necessary to work, learn, and connect to community and government services. The future of commerce, work, medicine, education and services have changed, and, in some instances, permanently. "Broadband has become the electricity of the 21st century".

The Provincial Government must continue its efforts in working with the Government of Canada to accelerate the pace of investment in this critical infrastructure.

In conclusion:

People and businesses are looking to government to start the rebuild and to move as expeditiously as possible. The Town of Renfrew, as a proud local municipality of the Province of Ontario, is ready to do its part and to work with the Government of Ontario and emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic even stronger.

I believe that these four proposed actions are critical pathways on this road to recovery and I look forward to working together to rebuild this great province.

On behalf of the Town Council and the citizens of the Town of Renfrew, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to provide input and applaud the incredible efforts being made to protect our citizens during these unprecedented times.

**Mayor Don Eady,
Town of Renfrew**

QUICK FACTS

Named the “**Most Welcoming Town 2017**” by The Wedge, The Town of Renfrew, was founded on the forestry industry and with the success of the lumber barons of the 1800s, made it a booming municipality in eastern Ontario. Over the years, the Town has moved from a resource-based economy to a diversified regional economy. With an established, vibrant downtown offering a good mix of retail and services; a manufacturing base and a regional health centre – Renfrew is building for the future.

Renfrew’s quality of life is exceptional for a community with a population of 8,553. The Town offers well rounded educational opportunities with 4 elementary schools and 2 high schools located in Renfrew. Health care in Renfrew is excellent. The municipality is home to the Renfrew and Area Health Village – a multi-service regional health care community. The Health Village is comprised of a hospital supporting 450 staff with state-of-the-art equipment; a variety of specialty clinics; a hospice; 2 long-term care centres; and a retirement residence.

Within easy access to Canada’s capital, Renfrew is also close to recreational amenities including: Algonquin Park, Ottawa River, white water rafting, skiing, multi-use trails, a motorsports park with the longest race track in Canada and 16 community parks.



THE TOP 5 REASONS TO INVEST IN RENFREW

- 1. Strategic Location – Rural Living with Urban Proximity.** Highway 417 provides easy access to large industry in the Ottawa Valley and to the Ottawa job market.
- 2. Competitive Cost for Business Owners and Residents.** Competitive land prices, development charges and tax rates.
- 3. Diverse Economy.** Healthcare, retail trade, manufacturing, educational services, public administration, tourism.
- 4. Capacity for New Development.** Water treatment and wastewater treatment plants have substantial reserve capacity to accommodate growth in residential, commercial and industrial ventures.
- 5. Investment for the Future!** Approximately \$30 million to be invested in Renfrew’s public infrastructure over the next 2 years including the complete revitalization of the downtown core; upgrades of 2 educational institutions and recreational facilities.

LOCATION & MARKET ACCESS

At the crossroads of Highway 17, 60 and 132, Renfrew provides easy access to northern Ontario and Ottawa. The closest US border crossing is 157 kilometers southeast at Ogdensburg-Prescott.

URBAN CENTER	KMS	MILES
Ottawa	95	58
Kingston	177	110
Montreal	290	180
Toronto	381	237
Sudbury	394	244

On average,
7,500 vehicles
pass through
Renfrew per day.



EASY ACCESS TO OTTAWA, BY HIGHWAY 417 (EXPANDING TO 4 LANES FROM ARNPRIOR TO RENFREW)

GOOD HIGHWAY CONNECTIONS BOTH EASTWARD AND NORTHWARD

VERY REASONABLE LAND COSTS WITH LOW DEVELOPMENT CHARGES

3 AIRPORTS WITHIN 1-HOUR DRIVE – OTTAWA INTERNATIONAL, ARNPRIOR (4,000 FT RUNWAY), PEMBROKE (5,000 FT RUNWAY)

EXCELLENT REGIONAL HEALTH CARE CENTRE IN A SAFE COMMUNITY SURROUNDED BY NATURE

MUCH LOWER AVERAGE DWELLING VALUE (\$214,769) THAN OTTAWA (\$444,589) OR ONTARIO (\$506,409)

HIGHLY CONNECTED WITH BROADBAND AND HIGH-SPEED INTERNET