

**Remarks by:
Colin Best, AMO President and
Councillor, Region of Halton**

**Monday August 21, 2023 – 9:15 am – 9:25 am
Ballroom 1, 2nd floor, RBC Place
London, Ontario**

AMO President Remarks and AGM

Good morning, everyone.

It is an honor to serve as AMO President, and it is wonderful to be here with you in London.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to acknowledge that many of our municipal colleagues are fighting dangerous fires in the Northwest Territories and British Columbia. They are also dealing with devastating floods in eastern Ontario and the Maritimes.

Our thoughts are with those communities. And our thanks go out to municipal employees who are working to save their communities, and other people's communities.

In emergencies, municipal governments often share services and rush to help others. That is happening now, and we appreciate all those who are answering the call.

I want to thank the speakers who have come before me today. We are already off to a great start.

This conference brings people together to make Ontario better.

Fundamentally, that is AMO's role, for the next three days, and every other day.

AMO brings people together – to make Ontario better.

And we have been doing that for well over a century. AMO will celebrate its 125th Anniversary next year.

This year we are celebrating the 100th Anniversary of AMO's first woman President.

You heard me correctly.

Mary Grant was the President of the Ontario Municipal Association in 1922 and 23.

She was the Clerk Treasurer of London Township, which is now Middlesex Center.

And AMO has had a woman President in every decade since then, apart from the 1940s.

Of course, the most famous woman to ever serve as President, is Hazel McCallion.

She was elected AMO President in 1978.

It's fair to say that Hazel McCallion was the greatest champion of municipal government that Ontario has ever had.

She never stopped fighting for municipal governments, and she never stopped fighting to make Ontario better.

I don't think Mayor McCallion ever missed an AMO conference and she could always be found in the front row.

I know she's here in spirit.

Please join me in thanking her for a lifetime of service.

[Applause]

She was direct, honest and committed to the best of public service.

Above all, she was always optimistic.

Hazel liked to start her sentences off with the expression, “Imagine if...”

I share Hazel’s optimism.

Just imagine what we can accomplish in this province if we all work together?

(Pause)

Mayor McCallion started her remarkable political career at the age of 55.

I want to take a moment to recognize everyone who is just starting out.

Please raise your hand if this is your first year on a municipal council.

42% of Ontario's council members were elected for the first time in 2022.

We appreciate your service, and I want to thank you with a round of applause as well.

Welcome to AMO.

[Applause]

Not everyone is going to thank you.

All the more reason why we appreciate your service.

We are counting on you to imagine what's possible.

Our communities are depending on us all to come together – like this. They are counting on us all to work together, and to achieve great things, together.

We all know that we have work to do. And I believe we all know that Ontario is on the brink of a new chapter.

Change is upon us, and we must rise to the occasion.

Much of that change is driven by growth.

People want to live, work and invest in Ontario.

We need to make sure they succeed.

High population growth must be matched by high economic growth.

We need to invest in the infrastructure that gets us places.

We need to invest in the infrastructure that gives everyone in Ontario an opportunity to succeed – in every part of Ontario.

We all know Ontario needs more housing, of all kinds, for all income levels.

In 2021, AMO offered nearly 100 recommendations to get housing built faster and to make housing more affordable.

The province chose its own path and is clearly prepared to be accountable for that decision.

Minister Clark will be here to speak about his government's ambitious housing targets.

They ARE ambitious.

And they DO need to be.

I want to be clear: municipal governments will do everything we can to help Ontario succeed.

Municipal governments are equally ambitious.

We believe that Ontario can build housing faster.

We also believe that a building boom should dovetail with good planning and responsible environmental protection.

Growth has to be met by more than just more housing.

We all know that new homes need to be supported by transit, hospitals, schools, water and wastewater plants, flood management, parks and all the things that

make Ontario a safe, sustainable, productive, and affordable place to live.

The affordability crisis in Ontario - and everywhere else in the world - is not just a housing issue.

It is an issue of income stability, food security and access to economic participation.

And the provincial and federal governments are uniquely positioned to make investments today that will make our communities:

- more affordable
- more productive

- more sustainable and
- more prosperous in the future.

Work is underway to shape the next cycle of federal investment in our communities because the federal government knows that investment in your communities is an investment in Canada's future.

And the province knows that investing in your communities is an investment in Ontario's prosperity.

And we all know that it is not just investment in physical infrastructure, but social infrastructure as well.

We celebrated important social infrastructure investments in the 2023 provincial budget. Specifically, there was significant investment to address homelessness and mental health.

I am optimistic that the province will continue to make the additional necessary investments that build up our ability to create prosperity.

Imagine if we can work together:

- to end homelessness in our communities
- to tackle the threat of climate change and

- to make life in Ontario more affordable, including for those most in need.

We have invited this government to partner with every community in this province to tackle the problems that threaten the social and economic prosperity of Ontario.

This past year has been a challenge, to say the least, but there is much we can do together.

Last week, AMO received a letter from Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy indicating a further delay of the long-overdue MPAC reassessment.

AMO has urged the government to move forward with the reassessment without further delay, to safeguard the stability of the system for residential and commercial property taxpayers and for municipalities.

I expect a few questions may come up about this at the ministers' forum tomorrow.

(Pause)

Last November, the government made an important commitment to fully off-set the financial impacts of Bill 23, and we will certainly work with them to fulfill that promise.

The province wanted audits in five municipal governments in the Greater Toronto Area.

They are underway – and we have not met a municipal treasurer who does not welcome the opportunity to make sure that our fiscal situation is perfectly understood by policy makers at Queen’s Park.

Inflation is high... interest rates are growing... and municipalities are the only order of government where revenue does not grow with the economy.

We want the Government of Ontario to stand on a solid fiscal foundation.

And we want to make sure tax dollars are well spent, and that public services are delivering good results for all Ontarians.

To that end, we should always be asking ourselves which order of government has the capacity to fund key public services and responsibilities.

We know that the current provincial-municipal fiscal framework in Ontario is failing us.

It is failing our residents, our small businesses and our major industries.

It needs to be updated for the 21st century.

Premier Ford will be here shortly.

We have seen that his government is willing to make bold changes. And we anticipate that he will be sharing good news this morning.

Municipal governments are eager to help.

Let's be ambitious.

Let's imagine if...

Let's work together.

Tomorrow's generations are counting on us all to get Ontario's next chapter right.

That's why we're all here today – we have come together so we can work together to make our communities and Ontario a better place.

AMO will always serve as a place where willing leaders can come together to achieve better for Ontario.

We have a remarkable program for you over the next three days.

We have incredible speakers and subject matter experts on the issues that matter most to you.

The municipal sector is doing important work:

- to improve representation

- to expand engagement
- and to bring new voices into the conversation.

The AMO conference is a forum for conversation and engagement.

It is my great honor to serve as AMO's President.

I need to thank my family, AMO staff and Board for making it possible. I could not do this without their support, and the support of my constituents in Ward 1 Milton and Halton.

Importantly, I want to thank all of you for being here.

Your participation in this Conference, and AMO, makes all the difference.

You are here because you are committed to public service, and to the well being of Ontario's diverse communities.

Rest assured, that AMO is committed to serving you well.

Thank you.

(Pause)

It is now my pleasure to welcome AMO Secretary Treasurer Trevor Wilcox to the stage.