

**Remarks by  
AMO President Colin Best  
2024 AMO Annual General Meeting and Annual Conference  
Plenary Hall, Shaw Centre, Ottawa, Ontario  
Monday, August 19, 2024**

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Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 2024 AMO Conference.

What a tremendous turnout.

Thank you for attending. You will not be disappointed.

We truly appreciate that the Premier and his Cabinet are here.

And a warm welcome to Opposition leaders and many MPPs.

That speaks to the conversations, collaboration and solutions that happen at an AMO conference.

2024 is also a year of celebration for AMO.

Last year, we celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AMO's first woman president.

This year, we are celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AMO, and 125 years of working in the service of municipalities.

That's 125 years of advancing good public policy in Ontario.

But more importantly, AMO wants to take the opportunity to celebrate you and the work you do.

We celebrate the municipal councils that govern our communities through collaboration and true accountability.

We celebrate the remarkable public servants in every part of Ontario, who exemplify professionalism and hard work in the service to their communities.

And ... we celebrate *your* communities, which are, quite simply, the foundation of Ontario's prosperity.

Thank you for serving your communities and the people and businesses who call them home.

I'll say it because, these days, too few people will.

You do a tough job – both elected officials and public servants.

Civil and political discourse is in decline.

It is something AMO is working hard to address through our Healthy Democracy project.

But we can't do it alone.

At last year's conference, the loudest applause was for a question asking the government when it would deliver on its commitment to a new municipal code of conduct.

We are still waiting for an answer.

Municipalities are the most accountable, transparent and trusted order of government.

New provincial legislation supporting municipal codes of conduct can help us keep it that way.

AMO and the province did the work on this file back in 2021, so let's "get it done" without further delay.

And let's get on with the important work that our communities expect.

There is much we can and must do.

We CAN build more housing, of all kinds, faster.

We CAN find shelter for people living in tents.

We CAN rescue people, families, and neighbourhoods being ravaged by the scourge of opioid addiction.

We CAN fund, build and maintain infrastructure more cost effectively and efficiently.

We CAN do our part to fight climate change and prepare for its inevitable impacts.

We CAN do all these things ... but only if we work together ... and only if we commit to helping one another succeed.

Progress in these areas CAN make our communities safer and more prosperous.

Working in partnership is nothing new for AMO.

In many ways, it is the reason why AMO has existed for 125 years.

AMO wants to extend the principle of partnership to great ends.

We believe that Ontario's current challenges warrant what we are calling a Social and Economic Prosperity Review.

We are proposing that we work together and take a hard look at how public services and infrastructure investments are funded across our province.

The goal would be to make government more affordable - for everyone.

For municipal governments, for the Ontario government, and for taxpayers.

The current provincial government did not create these structural problems.

But surely it has the resources and the wherewithal to address them.

People expect all orders of government to work together to tackle complex problems ... to make tough decisions ... and to provide the services people and businesses rely on.

AMO called for this Social and Economic Prosperity Review last fall.

Frankly, we were disappointed not to see it in the last Ontario Budget.

All three opposition parties have already committed to this.

And that is not because they are in opposition.

It's because they know what we all know.

And they know the current government very well knows.

They know that the current arrangements are undermining the prosperity of your communities.

They know that we are on an unsustainable path to decline if changes are not forthcoming.

They know that when the social fabric of our communities is torn, and when local economies face structural economic challenges alone, the broader wellbeing of the province is in jeopardy.

It makes good sense for all of us to come together and create new and better funding and service relationships that are more effective and more productive for everyone.

In Ontario, we are overdue.

The last comprehensive review of this kind was more than 15 years ago.

We should be charting a path that makes Ontario stronger for the next decade, and the decades after that.

Ontario can succeed only if its municipalities — of all types and sizes — can succeed.

Collectively, Ontario's municipalities invest almost \$65 billion a year into public services and infrastructure.

We know that, in the next 10 years, municipalities need to invest more than \$250 billion in infrastructure -- one hundred million of that for growth.

The idea that we can do that under the current fiscal arrangements *makes no sense*.

The idea that Ontario will thrive and prosper without that level of municipal infrastructure investment doesn't make sense either.

Structural and systematic problems will never be fixed if our partners pretend they don't exist.

And, these are problems we cannot solve on our own.

Let's consider homelessness and the opioid crisis.

In July, AMO released two key papers with our perspective and advice.

One was on the crisis of homelessness and encampments.

We estimate there were about 1,400 homeless encampments across Ontario last year.

As we consider our options, there are people across Ontario, and even outside this very building, who are counting on us all.

The other paper provides a municipal perspective on the opioid crisis.

More than 2,500 Ontarians died from an opioid-related overdose in 2023. That is about the same number of people who are at this conference right now.

Most were employed people. They worked regular day jobs in industries like construction. They should have enjoyed normal, productive lives.

The rate of opioid deaths for Indigenous people in Ontario is also four times higher than it is for the rest of the population.

It is a problem that cannot be ignored.

When we pulled together our recommendations to address homelessness and the opioid crisis, we did what we often do – we gathered input and advice from experts and stakeholders who share our concerns ... and we weighed the evidence.

Our recommendations reflect suggestions from:

Ontario's police chiefs.

Paramedic and fire chiefs.

Legal experts.

Clinicians.

The Canadian Mental Health Association.

And others.

We have done the work and made our case. And the facts don't lie.

Our primary recommendation is, and has always been, that we all need to commit to working together to solve complicated problems.

Homelessness and opioids are complex challenges. It will take all of us working together to find lasting solutions.

A year ago, I stood here sharing AMO's perspective on Bill 23 and the province's chosen path to addressing the housing crisis.

There's no need to rehash that moment — but there's every need to learn from it.

Good public policy is never created in a vacuum or in an echo-chamber.

It requires the input of broad and diverse interests, and well-informed, honest discussions about what can be achieved in the public interest.

I am not suggesting politics has no place in the discussion, but facts and expertise have an important place too.

And to its credit, the Ontario government realized its mistakes and has addressed many of them.

That took courage and intelligence.

Now, one year later, we are back in the room – with a new minister, a new approach and a complete reset.

Together, we are making progress on housing. Let's keep that going.

Let's work together – with both the provincial and federal governments - to make progress on homelessness, homeless encampments and the opioid crisis.

Let's work together to chart Ontario social and economic prosperity.

(Pause)

My time is up.

Both here at this podium, and as your AMO President.

It's been my great honour to serve you.

Soon you will choose my successor.

I'm pleased to say there's competition for the job.

I am impressed with the number of candidates this year for positions on the AMO Board including two candidates for president.

I believe it reflects confidence in AMO, and strong recognition that the AMO Board does important work.

I look forward to continuing to serve the AMO Board as Past President.

I want to thank former AMO presidents for being particularly helpful to me.

And I want to thank all members of the AMO Board for their hard work and dedication.

I also want to thank AMO's staff, and AMO's Executive Director Brian Rosborough.

AMO staff are excellent and committed to us. You will see that first-hand over the next three days.

Before I conclude, I want to thank my wife and family for supporting me through the past two years... and always.

Thanks... to all of my family... for all your patience, help and support.

Again, everyone, welcome to the AMO Conference.

Welcome to the opportunity that AMO represents, and to the success we can achieve together.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwetch.