

Newsletter

March 2026

EOWC Advocacy Update

The EOWC Attends Great Lakes Day 2026 in Washington, D.C.



Left-to-right: Nathan Townend, Vice-Chair, EOWC; Bonnie Clark, Chair, EOWC.

The EOWC was proud to represent eastern Ontario in Washington, D.C. as part of Great Lakes Day 2026, in partnership with the [Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative](#).

As the third-largest regional economy in the world, the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence region depends on strong cross-border collaboration, and eastern Ontario continues to play a key role in this dynamic binational corridor.

EOWC leadership, including Chair Bonnie Clark, Vice-Chair Nathan Townend, Secretary-Treasurer Sheridan Graham, and Executive Director Meredith Staveley-Watson, joined municipal leaders from across Canada and the United States for a series of high-level advocacy meetings. Together, the delegation held

10 meetings with U.S. congressional offices, embassy representatives, and key stakeholders.

As part of the delegation, municipal leaders called on U.S. government officials to:

- Preserve United States-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) and avoid new tariffs or tariff increases on Canada in 2026
- Partner with local governments and Indigenous communities to attract half a million new businesses to the Great Lakes region and increase traffic along the Seaway
- Reauthorize the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds to help close the water infrastructure gap
- Advance the Brandon Road Interbasin Project by releasing committed construction funds and removing administrative delays to protect the Great Lakes from invasive carp

[Learn More](#)



Left-to-right: Ryan Sorenson, Mayor, Sheboygan, WI; Sam Cunningham, Mayor, Waukegan, IL; Cavalier Johnson, Mayor, Milwaukee, WI; Alvin Tedjo, Councillor, Mississauga, ON; Chris Ronayne, Executive, Cuyahoga County, OH; Sea O'Meara, Councillor, Halton Region, ON; Tom Mrakas, Mayor, Aurora, ON; Lauren Anderson, Councillor, Chatham-Kent, ON; Byron Nolen, Mayor, Inkster, MI; Iain Lovatt, Mayor, Whitchurch-Stouffville, ON; Bonnie Clark, Chair, EOWC; Lew Conner, Mayor, Two Harbors City, MN; Marcus Muhammad, Mayor, City of Benton Harbor, MI; Peter Frost, Councillor, Township of the Archipelago, ON; Jack Bradley, Mayor, Lorain, OH; Mat Siscoe, Mayor, St. Catharines, ON.

The EOWC Opposes the ALTO High-Speed Train Project in its Current Form

On March 19, the EOWC Board of Directors passed a resolution opposing the Alto high-speed rail project as currently proposed. While supportive of strategic infrastructure in eastern Ontario, the EOWC emphasizes that projects must strengthen, not compromise, our rural and small-urban communities, businesses, and lands.

Key asks from the EOWC include:

- Full project and route details
- Clear understanding of local, environmental, and infrastructure impacts
- Meaningful engagement with municipalities, residents, First Nations, businesses, and regional partners
- Exploration of train routes along existing infrastructure corridors

Read the EOWC's Resolution

The EOWC Attends Minister Flack's Empire Club Event



Left-to-right: Rob Flack, Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Nathan Townend, Vice-Chair, EOWC.

The EOWC attended the Empire Club of Canada's lunch featuring Minister Rob Flack, where discussions focused on the Ontario government's latest actions to address the housing crisis.

Amid rising home prices, slowing construction, and ongoing economic pressures, the event highlighted efforts to reduce red tape, accelerate development, and better support communities across the province.

With eastern Ontario's population expected to grow by more than 35% by 2051, the EOWC remains committed to working with all levels of government and partners to increase housing supply, strengthen infrastructure, and support sustainable, long-term growth across the region.

The EOWC Attends Minister Bethlenfalvy's Pre-Budget Address



Left-to-right: Marcus Ryan, Chair, WOWC; Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister, Ministry of Finance; Bonnie, Chair, EOWC.

Ahead of the Ontario Budget, the EOWC was pleased to take part in an event hosted by the Empire Club of Canada featuring Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy. EOWC Chair Bonnie Clark joined leaders and partners to discuss the province's economic priorities and outlook.

The EOWC Shares 2026 Ontario Budget Statement

The EOWC has shared its reflections on the [2026 Ontario Budget](#), titled "A Plan to Protect Ontario," noting how it aligns with priorities outlined in [the EOWC's pre-budget submission](#).

The statement highlights investments in municipal infrastructure, housing, health services, and economic development that support eastern Ontario communities. The EOWC emphasizes the importance of continued provincial support to strengthen rural and small-urban municipalities, improve services, and build resilient communities across the region.

[Learn More](#)

EOWC Advocacy Win: Ontario Proposes Expanded HST Rebate to Boost Housing Affordability

The [Ontario government is proposing to remove the full 13% HST on eligible new homes](#) valued up to \$1 million, providing rebates of up to \$130,000 to make homeownership more affordable. In partnership with the federal government, this initiative could deliver nearly \$2.2 billion in joint tax relief, while encouraging new

home construction. The temporary measure is expected to stimulate thousands of housing starts, support job creation, and ease costs for families entering the housing market.

This represents a significant advocacy win for the EOWC, as it reflects recommendations submitted in [the EOWC's letter](#) to Minister Gregor Robertson and Ms. Ana Bailão regarding the implementation of Build Canada Homes.

The EOWC Attends Elect Respect Queen's Park Day



Elect Respect Representatives, led by Marianne Meed Ward, Mayor of Burlington.

The EOWC was pleased to join [Elect Respect](#) at Queen's Park for their advocacy day, standing in support of respectful and inclusive public service. The day provided a valuable opportunity to connect with leaders and reinforce a shared commitment to fostering safe, respectful environments for all.

[Take the Pledge](#)

The EOWC Hosts the Municipal Climate Interns at March Board Meeting



Left-to-right: Sarah Fencott, Municipal Climate Intern, Bruce County; Nathan Townend, Vice-Chair, EOWC; Larissa Coulas, Municipal Climate Intern, Renfrew County; Lindsay Winters, Municipal Climate Interns, Municipality of Port Hope; Ashtyn Nauffts, Municipal Climate Intern, Prince Edward County; Bonnie Clark, Chair, EOWC; Dexter Adkin, Municipal Climate Intern, Peterborough County; Ben Hicks, Municipal Climate Intern, Prince Edward County; Shania Dennall, City of Niagra Falls, Municipal Climate Intern, EOWC.

The EOWC was pleased to welcome the [Municipal Climate Interns](#) to its Board of Directors meeting on March 19.

The interns shared updates on their work to date within their host municipalities, while also gaining valuable insight into municipal governance and current advocacy efforts across eastern Ontario.

The EOWC Attends the 99th ORBA Convention



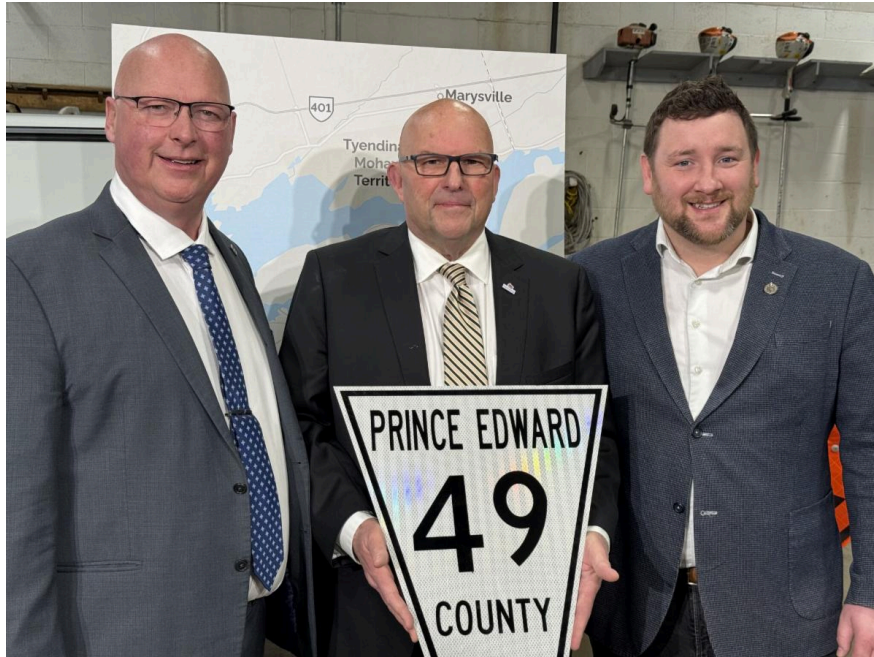
Left-to-right: Bonnie Clark, Chair, EOWC; Mark Mallett, President, ORBA.

The EOWC was pleased to attend the 99th [Ontario Road Builders' Association](#) Convention alongside partners from across the infrastructure sector.

Eastern Ontario plays a critical role in connecting Canada's two largest cities and is home to key trade-enabling highways, roads, and bridges that keep goods and people moving. The EOWC continues to emphasize that investing in infrastructure is investing in economic growth, with member municipalities at the forefront of building and maintaining strong, connected communities.

The EOWC also extends congratulations to incoming Ontario Road Builders' Association President, Mark Mallett.

Ontario Rehabilitates County Road 49 in Prince Edward County



Left-to-right: Ric Bresee, MPP, Hastings-Lennox and Addington; Steve Ferguson, Mayor, Prince Edward County; Tyler Allsopp, MPP, Bay of Quinte.

[Ontario is funding the rehabilitation of 18.4 km of County Road 49 between Picton and the Bay of Quinte Skyway Bridge](#), addressing one of the province's most deteriorated roads. The upgrades, including repaving, new culverts, and guiderail improvements, will enhance safety, and support the movement of people and goods.

Ontario Advances Highway 17 Expansion in Eastern Ontario



Left-to-right: Billy Denault, MPP, Renfrew - Nipissing - Pembroke; Ric Bresee, MPP, Hastings - Lennox and Addington; Jennifer Murphy, Warden, County of Renfrew.

The [Ontario government has taken the next step toward widening Highway 17 between Renfrew and Arnprior](#), issuing a Request for Proposals to design the expansion from two to four lanes. Spanning 22.5 kilometres, this project will strengthen a key Trans-Canada trade corridor, improve traffic flow, and support job creation during construction. Building on earlier upgrades completed in 2023, the expansion aims to boost economic resilience, enhance regional connectivity, and ensure safer travel for residents and businesses across eastern Ontario.

New Affordable Seniors Housing Coming to Belleville



The [Ontario and federal governments are investing \\$375,000 to support affordable housing for seniors in Belleville](#), including 18 rent-geared-to-income units at the new Epworth Place development. Part of a broader effort to address the housing crisis, the project will provide a mix of affordable and market-rate apartments with community-focused amenities. Construction is underway, with residents expected to move in later this summer.

Ontario Advances Plans for Major Nuclear Project in Port Hope



Ontario has secured a key agreement to advance [a proposed nuclear generating station at the Wesleyville site in Port Hope](#), a project poised to become the largest of its kind in the world. The development could create over 10,500 jobs and contribute an estimated \$235 billion to the provincial economy while delivering reliable, clean power to millions of homes. The project marks a significant step toward meeting rising energy demand and supporting long-term economic growth.

New HART Hub Opens in Renfrew County to Support Recovery

[Ontario has launched a Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment \(HART\) Hub in Renfrew County](#), expanding access to integrated mental health, addictions, and social services. The facility provides treatment, supportive housing, employment counseling, and basic needs assistance, helping individuals facing housing instability and substance use challenges on their path to recovery.

Ontario Moves Forward on New Brockville Correctional Complex



[Ontario is issuing a Request for Qualifications to build the new Brockville Correctional Complex and expand the St. Lawrence Valley Correctional and Treatment Centre](#), adding 295 beds in eastern Ontario. This initiative is part of a provincewide plan to add 1,436 correctional beds by 2032, strengthening bail enforcement and ensuring space is available to keep serious and repeat offenders behind bars.

Ontario Investing \$45M to Repair Municipal Roads and Bridges

The [Ontario government is providing \\$45 million through the 2026-27 Connecting Links program](#) to help 20 municipalities repair roads and bridges that connect communities, support local jobs, and facilitate the movement of goods. Funding will support 21 projects across the province, boosting infrastructure reliability and economic growth.

This includes the following eastern Ontario municipalities:

- Bancroft
- Centre Hastings
- Havelock-Belmont-Methuen
- Loyalist Township
- Madawaska Valley
- Smith Falls

Partner Updates



EORN

EASTERN ONTARIO REGIONAL NETWORK

EORN continues to move forward on key activities:

- Submitted comments to the CRTC on the Mobile Reporting Standards (CRTC 2026-9) consultation
- Annual General Meeting scheduled for April 16, 2026
- February project updates shared with municipalities, MPs, and MPPs

Regional Updates and News

Ontario



Ontario Invests \$2M to Build More Accessible Communities

The [Ontario government is investing over \\$2 million through the new Enhancing Access to Spaces for Everyone Grant](#) to support more than 40 projects aimed at improving accessibility for seniors and people with disabilities. Funding will help municipalities, non-profits, and Indigenous communities upgrade spaces with features like ramps, elevators, accessible washrooms, and safer pathways.

Ontario Invests \$21.5M to Strengthen Long-Term Care Workforce

The [Ontario government is investing over \\$21 million to train and upskill 700 long-term care staff](#), with a focus on supporting rural and northern communities. Through expanded Learn and Earn programs, existing workers will have opportunities to become personal support workers and registered practical nurses while continuing to work. This investment aims to strengthen staffing, improve quality of care for residents, and support career growth within the long-term care sector across the province.

Ontario Leads Historic Agreement to Build National Energy Corridor

Ontario has secured a landmark agreement with provinces and territories across Canada to strengthen and connect the country's electricity systems through [a new national energy corridor](#). The partnership will advance transmission infrastructure, expand electricity trade, and support a more reliable and resilient grid to meet growing demand.

Ontario Expands Support for Rural and Northern Livestock Producers

The [Ontario government is modernizing the Veterinary Assistance Program to improve access to veterinary care for livestock producers in Northern and rural communities](#). Updates include expanded eligibility, streamlined applications, increased compensation rates, and coverage for additional livestock such as honeybees and fish. These changes aim to strengthen the agri-food sector, support veterinarians, and ensure farmers have reliable services to maintain healthy livestock and resilient operations.

Ontario Commits Up to \$90M for Ice Storm Recovery

The [Ontario government is providing up to \\$90 million to help municipalities recover from the March 2025 ice storm](#), which caused widespread damage and power outages across central and eastern Ontario. Through the Municipal Ice Storm Assistance program, 59 communities are receiving initial funding to support emergency response efforts and cleanup costs, helping restore local infrastructure and services.

Upcoming Events



**GREAT LAKES AND
ST. LAWRENCE**
CITIES INITIATIVE

GLSLCI Conference

The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative will be hosting their annual conference from May 6-8, 2026, in Hamilton, Ontario.

[Register](#)



EOWC 2026 Queen's Park Advocacy Day

On May 11, 2026, the EOWC will head to Toronto for our Queen's Advocacy Day, advocating for the needs of eastern Ontario's 103 municipalities.



2026 CAMA Conference

From May 25-27, 2026, CAMA will host their 52nd Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting at the Whistler Convention Centre, in Whistler, British Columbia.

[More information](#)

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About the EOWC

The EOWC is a regional non-profit organization representing 13 upper and single-tier municipalities across eastern Ontario. The EOWC supports and advocates on behalf of 103 municipalities and serves 1.1 million residents. The EOWC covers an area of approximately 50,000 square kilometers from Northumberland County to the Québec border.

The EOWC has gained support and momentum by speaking with a united voice to champion regional municipal priorities and work with government, business leaders, the

media, and the public.

Visit the EOWC's website at eowc.org.

Connect with the EOWC

2026 Chair, Warden of Peterborough County, Bonnie Clark

2026 Vice-Chair, Warden of Lennox and Addington County, Nathan Townend

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