

**Thunder Bay e-newsletter editorial**  
**Ian McCormack**  
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Northern Ontario has factored prominently in recent outreach and lobbying efforts by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC). A couple weeks ago, Trevor McPherson, the OCC's Director of Strategic Initiatives, spent a few days in Thunder Bay, meeting with business and community leaders. Trevor was in town as part of an ongoing outreach effort to gather program insight for the Ontario Economic Summit (OES) and to foster new relationships with OES stakeholders in the region.

The OES is the province's premier forum for leaders from business, labour, government, academia and the not-for-profit sector to address our province's evolving needs and opportunities and grow the economy in a collaborative fashion.

In addition to meeting with TBCC's Board of Directors, Trevor met with City Manager Tim Commisso, Thunder Bay International Airport Director Jack Mallon and Douglas Murray of AbitibiBowater's Thunder Bay Operations. Subsequent discussions have also been scheduled with business leaders from the First Nations community including Harvey Yesno of Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund.

Meanwhile, *Ontario's Northern Growth Plan* has been reviewed by the OCC and while the chamber commends the government for its efforts in bringing a focus to the problems and challenges of economic development in Northern Ontario, it also points out that as currently written, the Plan is missing concrete ideas and actionable solutions. The OCC's draft recommendations include:

- The Plan include benchmarks, achievement timeframes, key performance indicators, and assigned responsibilities for each goal identified.
- As one strategy to tackle the North's population decline and aging workforce, the Plan should outline a strategy to help attract new immigrants to the North.
- The Plan must provide specifics on responsibilities or representation in reference to the "regional economic centres" proposed in Northern Ontario.
- It should provide concrete plans and initiatives for the Northern Research and Policy Institute in the *Northern Ontario Growth Plan* which is to be established.
- Establish a Green Energy Research and Policy Institute to position the region as a world class leader in Green Energy.

OCC policy staff are currently working with a number of Northern Chambers, including TBCC to fine tune these recommendations and ensure they reflect and compliment northern policy positions.

While the Ontario government has been examining northern issues in greater depth, so too has the OCC. Following consultation with key OCC members in the north, a Northern Strategy Report is in its final stages of review and will soon be released. It examines the economic outlook of the north and how it and other northern issues impact the province as a whole.

The Northern Strategy Report reviews policy issues specifically pertaining to Northern Ontario and outlines a series of recommendations that can be used to lobby government, elected officials, and relevant stakeholders. The report will also be utilized to influence discussions pertaining to the government's proposed Northern Growth Plan.

These and other issues will be the focus of the upcoming OCC Annual General Meeting & Conference from April 30 – May 2<sup>nd</sup> when delegates from across Ontario convene to determine the OCC's key policy priorities for the coming year. Policy recommendations from member chambers, including the TBCC, are soon to be released for review prior to debate at the conference which will be held in Windsor. Members of the TBCC will be in attendance.

As always, feel free to contact me at 345-5453 if there is anything you would like to follow up on.

Ian McCormack