

AMO Conference, Ottawa August 13-16, 2017

I am thankful for the opportunity to attend AMO and wish to report to Council and CAO C. Wray ideas, news, and information from my first AMO experience.

### **WAWA'S REPUTATION**

Without exception, every person I spoke too over the length of the conference not only knew of CAO Chris Wray, but spoke highly of his expertise and his dedication in the Municipal government community. It is worth noting that Wawa is equated with the exceptional work of Chris Wray; from Renfrew, to Georgian Bay, to Sault Ste Marie to Kenora, and more. This is an asset for our town in so many ways; despite our challenges and small size, we are respected. Elected officials come and go and eras of personality governance end at election time in communities across the province. But it is the "top job" in the municipality, that of our CAO, that "makes" the community, often behind the scenes and without recognition. Among his peers and ours, Mr. Wray is highly respected.

### **CANNIBIS**

There are many ideas for potential opportunities for Wawa. One that I think deserves sincere consideration is the business of federally licensed cannabis production.

I attended a session about the legislation decriminalizing cannabis and how municipalities are preparing for this. The proposed legislation is expected to determine how cannabis is sold and who will grow it. AMO currently has a task force dedicated to this issue. It is an issue that will affect all municipalities and from what I observed, this is a topic that everyone is curious about, not just elected officials and senior municipal staff. This is a topic that perhaps Council could discuss publicly in terms of the Municipal plan to be prepared for the 2018 federal legislation. I say this because I recognized my own bias and stereotypical ideas when I attended this session. A panelist was an employee of a federally licensed cannabis company and I quite honestly, and naively, expected a completely different type of speaker and person than the polished young woman who spoke of the business as a regulated, professional, and secure expanding business model in Ontario. (sadly, I think I expected a "pot head", whatever that is!) Attracting such a business to Wawa should be a high priority. Sales of cannabis is done online only with delivery by Canada Post. Production workers are trained by the employer so the availability of a specialized workforce is not a requirement. The idea of a cannabis production company locating in Wawa needs to be explored and citizens of Wawa need to be involved in the process.

### **THE LOCAL SHARE**

The Local Share, a proposal to raise the HST by 1% which would solely fund infrastructure costs in Ontario's 444 municipalities is a plan that I agree with wholeheartedly! There is and will continue to be, a serious infrastructure deficit in Ontario's communities. The Local Share is an excellent option to funding these costs through property owners only. It is a plan that would see every Ontarian contributing to the ballooning cost of bridges, roads, sewers, and buildings and more, in their

community. The difficulty is that no provincial politician will agree to even consider The Local Share as an option, with all three-party leaders steadfastly refusing to raise provincial taxation. This is a predictable outcome considering the provincial election is less than 10 months away. What is necessary now is an education and lobbying plan directed to citizens of Ontario, with the goal of voters supporting, and ultimately demanding the Local Share plan be approved rather than local taxation increases year after year, while infrastructure continues to age and deteriorate.

## **ILLEGAL TOBACCO**

A lunchtime discussion about illegal tobacco and tobacco smuggling was interesting in that I currently have no idea if this is an issue in our municipality. This is an ongoing problem in eastern Ontario and Quebec. It is suggested that Council to ask the Police Services Board to inform us of the incidence of this activity in Wawa. It was emphasised that the problem of illegal tobacco being circulated in a community is not just the loss of federal taxation, but the very real possibility of tobacco products being made readily available to minor individuals. Tobacco consumption would increase due to low prices. As well, as with the presence of any illegal contraband, criminal activity increases leading to social problems, community safety issues and increased costs to the justice system.

## **SHARED ECONOMY**

Whether municipal governments acknowledge it or have a plan in place to deal with the new sharing economy, rest assured, it is already happening in every community across Ontario in one form, or many. An Airbnb representative spoke about how almost every community has Airbnb listings; people are opening their homes to strangers to supplement or create an income. Sault Ste. Marie currently has 44 Airbnb active listings. But Airbnb is only one example of sharing. Uber is everywhere and it will not be long, if it is not happening now, until someone becomes an Uber driver in Wawa. How will we deal with this? Will we deal with it? The City of Guelph has developed a 27-page document; Navigating the Shared Economy, a 6 Decision Guide for Municipalities which is available to you. The document does not make recommendations but does address areas that municipalities may identify as challenges as well as opportunities. The shared economy has many positive outcomes for small communities, in my opinion. Community gardens, on a greater scale than Wawa currently has, should be a Council priority in terms of support, development, and organization to foster food security, community involvement and skill development. Trading services, recycling of useable items instead of depositing them in the landfill, transportation sharing; these are all part of a shared economy and can help to fill a void in communities like ours that have a large low-income sector as well as a lack of formal services for traditional hire. For example, some communities have a small job bank where people trade hours performed doing jobs in homes for jobs performed at their own home. An hour of grass mowing can be traded for one hour of ironing

dress shirts. The takeaway from this session was that we already live in this new economy so it is not a question of stopping it, it is rather a question of municipalities embracing it, regulating it where possible, and encouraging the growth of it.

## **WOMEN IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT**

Research has proven that it is more difficult to attract women to politics than visible minorities. That is an alarming fact. Women tend to talk themselves out of seeking political office. Research has shown that minorities are generally well represented where there are minority populations, while women are underrepresented everywhere. It is clear that each municipality needs to develop a strategy to attract women to local government. Perhaps a committee of Council could be struck prior to the 2018 election whose mandate is to conduct public information sessions geared towards women who are considering public office.

It was mentioned in the session, that local government does not attract young adults to seek office. This is a valid point. In the sea of people attending AMO, it was difficult to find young Councillors (under 40), The majority seemed to be 50 plus. This is in no way a qualified statement; simply an observation of the group. Perhaps a good look at Marathon's student councillor program is in order. The Mayor of Marathon spoke about the program which involves two students each school year, in local government, where they act as councillors except for voting. It is an admirable program and certainly does get young people involved in something they don't think about in their everyday lives. I would think a good look, by council, of how to involve young people, in a meaningful way, should be a priority. Many communities have Mayor for a Day programs where a child is selected to accompany the Mayor during an event. The platform is not the message, the message is Council should consider strategies that attract young people, women, and minorities to local government involvement.

## **ETHICS**

The last session of the conference was one of the best; a session about ethics in general and ethics in political life. Dr. Christopher Bauer spoke about how there is a special place in hell for fence sitters! He was adamant that unethical behaviour must not be tolerated and is easily recognized. If one thinks they may have crossed a line and their behaviour may be unethical, it already is. If you think it unethical, it is. That is the message. If there is doubt, it is unethical. Simple, right? Not always. The takeaway here is to not normalize unethical behaviour. Do not change the culture of the organization by normalizing bad behaviour. While in this session and afterward, I could not help but apply this message to our situation with Councillor Liddle. Council has acted correctly in sanctioning this Councillor who has used her office to launch a personal campaign of destruction, division, and opposition against her own community and most importantly, fellow Councillors and Municipal staff. We must continue, at every

opportunity, to publicly sanction Councillor Liddle. We cannot, at any time, normalize her behaviour. Councillor Liddle has produced quasi legal documents (all without merit) with the sole purpose of causing distress and anxiety for her fellow Councillors, Municipal staff, and her community. An obscene amount of public money has been spent defending the accusations and claims of Councillor Liddle. At no time has Councillor Liddle acted in an ethical manner. I would suggest that Council perhaps restate the sanctions and limitations imposed on Councillor Liddle, at every single meeting until the term is done. It is easy for people to forget Councillor Liddle's destructive and unconscionable behaviour without a constant reminder. A simple statement is a possibility and one that I would support.

Further, if anyone wishes to receive valuable email ethics information from Dr. Bauer, visit [www.bauerethicsseminars.com](http://www.bauerethicsseminars.com) to be added to the listserv.

### **ITS CAMPAIGN TIME!**

I attended, of course, the party leader's session, as well as Nik Nanos session speaking about political polling and election behaviour, and the Ministers forum. These were all enlightening sessions, with many interesting points and statements. I will say that the party leader's forum was like a leader's campaign debate and as such, one must take many of the promises and statements in the context of occurring in these last months before an election. An important strategy, I would think, is for Councillors to become familiar with the Municipal Affairs, Economic Development, Northern Development, and Mines, etc. critics of the PC and NDP parties as it is a very real possibility that the current government will not be forming a new government in 2018. (My opinion only, based on current polling).

Respectfully,

Councillor Sandra Weitzel

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