

# Local politicians to fight for hospital at AMO conference

By Christina Commisso  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Five Milton representatives are heading to the AMO conference next week, and many of them already have a list of questions ready for the Provincial ministers attending the annual event.

Premier Dalton McGuinty, Jim Bradley, minister of municipal affairs and housing, Sandra Pupatello, minister of economic development and trade and provincial opposition leaders Tim Hudak and Andrea Horwath are some of the participants speaking at this year's Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference.

"In our case, it will be about putting our best foot forward to promote the Milton hospital expansion," said Mayor Gord Krantz about the conference, which he'll be attending with councillors Brian Penman (Ward 1), Mike Boughton (Ward 2) and Cindy Lunan and Jan Mowbray (Ward 3).

Krantz said he would also like to discuss the Tremaine Road and Hwy. 401 interchange — set to begin construction in 2013 — and the proposed Wilfrid Laurier University campus with Provincial ministers and delegates at the four-day conference.

"It's a lobbying opportunity... We use AMO as an opportunity to rub shoulders with those people who will help with the decision making process," said Penman. "The last time we were in that situation, we were lobbying for the hospital and it became

a burning issue of how desperate we are for an expansion."

Other issues Penman would like to discuss at the conference are green energy initiatives and ideas to beautify Milton.

"Looking at new alternative energy sources, geo-thermal, new ground sources, heating and cooling techniques, learning about government subsidies and having the opportunity to hear very knowledgeable speakers give us a model of thought for what we're doing."

Looking to councillors in neighbouring municipalities for guidance, Penman said he would like to learn about ways to give Milton a face-lift, for example, filling street medians with flowers.

"Milton is blessed in so many ways with its location but I think the beautification of streetscapes needs some attention."

Penman said he would also like some answers from Provincial representatives, who he thinks have demonstrated a streak of inconsistencies as of late.

"In dealing with the Province, it seems the only consistency is inconsistency," said the long-time councillor. He pointed to the HST, the eco tax, and recent changes to the Green Energy Act, which saw the Province drop the rate it pays to small producers of renewable electricity from 80.2 cents a kilowatt/hour to 58.8 cents.

"People who spent money (on producing renewable energy) lost their rate of return, and their business plan goes out the window," he said.

Krantz said the AMO conference is an

opportunity for municipalities to gain a better understanding of issues in other municipalities.

"Without that understanding of Ontario, really, you lag behind," he said.

Pointing to the gas tax reform in 2005, which saw a portion of federal gas tax funds distributed directly to Ontario's municipalities, Krantz said by municipalities working together, they had an effect on the provincial government.

"When you go into a conference like this, it's important (for municipalities) to speak with a united voice."

Krantz said he's worried Ontario's cities and towns will start to feel the brunt of the

Province's debt and hopes he can work with other municipal leaders to prevent funding cuts.

"It's no secret the Province is cash-strapped...I can see a pull back with some of the funding the Province might be involved in and this gives me some concerns," he said.

"Generally service cuts have a negative effect on property taxes. When you go to a conference like this, go in with a united voice and an open mind."

This year's Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference will take place from August 15 to 18 in Windsor.

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