

July 21, 2025

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford:

It has now been four months since the Municipality of Tweed submitted two detailed proposals for your consideration, both aimed at addressing pressing challenges facing small rural and northern communities. Despite our sincere efforts and outreach, we have yet to receive an acknowledgment or response from your office, your ministers, our local MPP, or the leaders of the opposition parties. This silence is deeply disheartening.

Please know that the Municipality of Tweed is grateful for your commitment to investing billions to protect Ontarians as promised in this year's provincial election. We look forward to the opportunity to capitalize on those investments.

The first proposal, sent directly to your office on March 25, 2025, addressed the *Repatriation of OPP Costs for Small Rural and Northern Communities During this Period of Uncertainty*. Our proposal suggested a temporary repatriation of OPP policing costs as a meaningful way to demonstrate that this government understands and supports the needs of small municipalities.

The proposal included two important conditions: first, that OPP costs be repatriated to the province during this time of economic instability and global uncertainty triggered by U.S. policies; second, that the municipalities benefiting from this relief reinvest those savings directly into community infrastructure projects. In Tweed's case, the annual savings of \$1.2 million would allow us to undertake long-overdue infrastructure upgrades that we simply cannot afford under the current burden of provincial policing costs.

The second proposal, submitted March 27, 2025, focused on *Supporting Small Rural and Northern Ontario Housing Developers* and aligns with your government's own priority to reduce barriers to housing development. This proposal was presented to Minister Surma, AMO President Robin Jones, and MPP Ric Bresee at the 2025 ROMA Conference. During our January 19, 2025 ROMA delegation, Minister Surma expressed interest and committed to raising it with then-Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Paul Calandra. We revisited the proposal with MPP Bresee during a March 13th meeting and have since

shared it with ROMA President Christa Lowry, Federal Minister of Housing and Infrastructure Minister Robertson, and Prime Minister Carney.

We have copied the leaders of Ontario's three main political parties on this letter, as we did when the proposals were originally submitted. We respectfully ask all parties—regardless of political affiliation to consider their merit and potential, and to speak to them in the Legislature. We are eager to work with any partner committed to helping rural and northern Ontario succeed.

Both proposals offered practical, shovel-ready ideas grounded in lived rural experience. And while we remain grateful for ongoing provincial support through the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF: \$2,058,700) and the Ontario Critical Infrastructure Fund (OCIF: \$340,000), it must be acknowledged that these funds are no longer sufficient to meet the growing financial and infrastructure burdens faced by communities like ours. To manage persistent shortfalls, Tweed Council has had to implement tax increases of 7.3% in 2023, 17.8% in 2024, and 15% in 2025. The burden this places on our residents is both significant and unsustainable.

Given that four months have passed without acknowledgment, I am resubmitting both proposals for renewed consideration. It is deeply concerning that when a small rural municipality—operating with limited resources and under significant financial strain—takes the initiative to present tangible and constructive solutions, those efforts are met with silence. We expect such outreach to be met with dialogue. The absence of even basic acknowledgment sends a troubling message: that rural and northern municipalities are to be seen but not heard. Furthermore, I have reached out to AMO and ROMA and unfortunately my faith in both organizations as effective advocates in this regard is waning.

As I have made clear to all parties, I remain more than willing to serve as an engaged and constructive member of any committee or working group convened to address the challenges before us. The situation is serious. Many of us are teetering on the brink. The time to act was yesterday.

I respectfully request your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Yours truly,

Don DeGenova
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cc. Minister Surma, Minister of Infrastructure

Minister Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Minister Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance
Minister Thompson, Minister of Rural Affairs
MPP Ric Bresee

MPP M. Stiles, Leader of the NDP and Leader of the Opposition
Ms. B. Crombie, Leader of the Liberal Party
MPP M. Schreiner, Leader of the Green Party

Robin Jones, President, AMO
Christa Lowry, President, ROMA
Warden Bonnie Clark, Chair, Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus
Bob Mullin, Warden Hastings County

A copy of this letter has also been sent to all rural and northern Ontario Mayors.

Proposal to Repatriate OPP Costs for Small Rural and Northern Communities During this Period of Uncertainty

July 21, 2025 (Originally submitted March 25, 2025)

As Mayor of the Municipality of Tweed, I am representative of many small rural and northern Ontario communities that face growing financial pressures. Even in the best of times, we operate with limited resources, and now, the threat of President Trump's tariffs only intensifies our financial stress. Municipalities with populations of 10,000 or less are particularly vulnerable. We grapple with the same issues as larger cities—housing shortages, food insecurity, homelessness, healthcare concerns, inflation, and an overwhelming infrastructure funding deficit—but with far fewer financial resources and staffing capabilities. Unlike urban centres, which have access to additional funding streams and economies of scale, small rural and northern communities struggle to provide essential services with minimal support. Moreover, we are disproportionately affected by extreme weather events, further straining our already fragile infrastructure and emergency response capabilities. Without immediate and targeted assistance, many of our communities risk falling into economic and social decline.

With that in mind, we propose a temporary solution that would demonstrate your government's support for small rural and northern Ontario. Premier Ford, has stated that securing a strong majority was essential to investing billions in response to the Trump tariffs. Repatriating OPP policing costs for small rural and northern communities during this period of economic uncertainty would be a swift and impactful show of support. This initiative would immediately benefit 330 municipalities at a cost of less than \$600 million. In the context of multi-billion-dollar expenditures, a \$600 million investment is a meaningful way to show small municipalities that they matter.

This initiative could be structured with two key conditions: it would remain in place while Ontario remains vulnerable to economic pressures, and the funds saved by municipalities would be reinvested into critical infrastructure projects. For example, such a measure for the Municipality of Tweed would free up approximately \$1.2 million, allowing us to address urgent infrastructure needs and support our local economy.

We need all levels of government to recognize that small rural and northern municipalities are extremely vulnerable and now more than ever we need governments so show that they stand with small municipalities. We look forward to discussing our proposal with you.

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Proposal to Support Small Rural and Northern Housing Developers

July 21, 2025 (Originally submitted March 27, 2025)

The Municipality of Tweed supports all efforts to remove barriers to housing development. To demonstrate our commitment, we have proactively revised our zoning bylaws to encourage housing densification and affordability. We now permit tiny homes (400–600 sq. ft.), smaller homes (900–1200 sq. ft.), mobile homes on rural lots, reduced lot sizes and setbacks, and fewer parking space requirements. Additionally, we do not impose development fees. These measures aim to diversify our housing stock, enhance affordability, and minimize environmental impact.

Our commitment to housing expansion is already delivering results. We are collaborating with builders to develop a 80-unit retirement community and a retirement home, complementing our existing 120-bed extended care facility. In 2024, the Municipality of Tweed led Hastings County in housing starts, issuing 122 building permits, including 38 new homes and a 25-unit geared-to-income apartment complex. Last year, we hosted a Developers Forum, where local developers presented subdivision plans that could bring over 600 new homes to our community within the next five years.

We made a \$4 million+ investment in our lagoon that will allow us to accommodate another 1500 homes. Our current well enhancements allow us to service an additional 750 homes. We are investigating future new water sources to allow us to reach our target of 1500 homes.

However, infrastructure costs for new subdivisions remain a significant barrier. Unlike large urban developers, small rural developers lack the financial backing of major investors and must independently finance subdivision infrastructure, making projects cost-prohibitive. There is a growing perception that federal and provincial housing investments are disproportionately focused on large urban centers, despite billions of dollars being allocated to housing initiatives.

Our proposal seeks financial assistance through interest-free loans for small rural and northern developers to cover infrastructure costs. These loans would be repaid as homes are sold, ensuring the government recoups its investment with the only cost being interest. Unlike current urban housing initiatives—where both principal and interest fall entirely on the province and federal government—this model ensures fiscal responsibility. Additionally, rather than the standard 25–30-year amortization period, our proposal anticipates repayment within five years, making it a practical and innovative solution to the housing crisis in small rural and northern communities.

The demand for housing in regions similar to ours remains strong. Seniors want to age in place, staying close to friends, family, and their established healthcare providers. When seniors relocate to urban centers, they leave behind a gap in healthcare continuity at a critical stage in their lives. Conversely, when seniors transition to retirement communities within rural areas, they free up existing housing stock for younger families. Additionally, the influx of urban retirees to rural communities has further driven demand which in turn increases the housing stock in those urban areas. Housing in small communities like Tweed can be built at a fraction of the cost compared to large urban centers, offering a cost-effective solution to Ontario's housing crisis. The Municipality of Tweed's absence of development fees provides yet another financial incentive for homebuyers and developers alike.

Premier Ford, we have answered your call for municipalities to facilitate housing growth. We urge you to give serious consideration to this proposal, recognizing Tweed as a model for how rural communities can be part of the solution to Ontario's housing crisis. We need all levels of government to recognize that small rural and northern municipalities are key to helping this country and province resolve our housing crisis. We look forward to discussing our proposal with you.

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