



SAULT STE. MARIE

News Release

For Immediate Release

Northern Ontario Large Urban Mayors meet in Sault Ste. Marie

Sault Ste. Marie, ON (2023 04 14) – Mayor Matthew Shoemaker hosted the mayors and chief administrative officers of North Bay, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Timmins for a Northern Ontario Large Urban Mayors (NOLUM) meeting on Friday, April 14, 2023.

Agenda items for the meeting included labour force development, immigration, physician/nurse practitioner recruitment, downtown development, mental health and addictions, homelessness and municipal finances.

“This is the first opportunity we’ve had to gather as a group to discuss our shared priorities and areas of concern, and I was pleased to host my colleagues in Sault Ste. Marie,” said Mayor Matthew Shoemaker.

Several opportunities to strengthen collaboration with Provincial and Federal governments were discussed during the meeting, such as increased coordination on health care, housing and immigration.

NOLUM is calling for the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) to be made a permanent program. After lobbying efforts from NOLUM, the Federal government launched RNIP in November 2019 as a five-year pilot program. The pilot has been utilized by companies across the North to fill job vacancies.

“With northern Ontario receiving only a small share of international migration while experiencing demographic challenges related to age structure and birth rates, there is a clear need for the pilot to be made permanent. Increased immigration to Northern Ontario is good for all of Northern Ontario. It strengthens our economies by helping employers address labour shortages – filling jobs that would otherwise remain vacant,” said North Bay Mayor Peter Chirico.

The impact of Northern Ontario’s demographic situation extends to health care as well, with an older population in need of more options to access to family physicians and specialists. The Provincial government recently announced an increase in medical student spaces in Ontario, and NOLUM is calling for the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University (NOSM U) to receive its fair share.

“Simply put, we need more doctors in Northern Ontario and NOSM U represents the foremost option to achieve this. NOSM U has one of the highest recruitment and retention rates among Canada’s medical schools, and increasing the student spaces at NOSM U would have a profound impact on the North,” said Greater Sudbury Mayor Paul Lefebvre.

The mental health and addictions crisis continues to tragically affect communities across Northern Ontario, with three to four times higher Opioid-related mortality rates in the North than the rest of Ontario. All NOLUM communities have a need for more support from the Ministry of Health for consumption and treatment services.

“Municipalities should not be expected to provide funding, especially operational funding, for a health care issue. It is paramount that the Provincial and Federal governments act immediately to provide the approvals and funding we need for all of our communities to get the consumption and treatment services that are available and funded elsewhere in Ontario,” said Sault Ste. Marie Mayor Matthew Shoemaker.

The housing crisis is not only affecting large, urban centres – communities across Northern Ontario continue to be impacted – and there is a need for funding from the

Provincial and Federal governments for transitional housing and related support services, such as the recently announced increases to the Ontario Homelessness Prevention Program.

“More action is needed now to address the housing and homelessness crisis faced by communities across the north. The challenges we’re facing are complex and unique, and municipalities need sufficient resources to advance priorities that are important for all levels of government. For example, the Province could amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act to define a Northern Service Hub, making available additional resources,” said Timmins Mayor Michelle Boileau.

Sault Ste. Marie City staff and Social Services of Sault Ste. Marie delivered a presentation to NOLUM about the Downtown Ambassador Program, and the positive impact it has had locally since it was launched in 2022.

“NOLUM is a great opportunity for our communities to learn from each other – to see what is working and what can be implemented across the north. The Downtown Ambassador Program has provided street outreach and peer support, and it is concept we will be exploring,” said Thunder Bay Mayor Ken Boshcoff.

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