



**NORTHERN ONTARIO
SERVICE DELIVERERS ASSOCIATION**

December 17, 2009

**Hon. Gerry Phillips,
Minister of Energy and Infrastructure and the Ontario Growth Secretariat
Hearst Block
4th Floor, 900 Bay Street
Toronto ONTARIO
M7A 2E1**

**Hon. Michael Gravelle,
Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry
Room 5630, Whitney Block
99 Wellesley Street West
Toronto ONTARIO
M7A 1W3**

Dear Ministers:

RE: NORTHERN GROWTH PLAN

As you know, the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers' Association (**NOSDA**) is an incorporated body that brings together 11 of Northern Ontario's 12 Municipal Service Managers. We plan and coordinate the Northern Ontario delivery of public services and social infrastructure programs that result in measurable gains to the quality of life of Northerners through:

- the provision of financial and other supports to persons having difficulty entering or re-entering the labour force;
- the creation, maintenance and provision of affordable, social housing;
- the provision of quality of early learning and child care services that reassure their parents that their children are in safe, nurturing environments while they busy themselves at work or upgrading their skills;
- the provision of emergency medical services in times of personal crisis

We are pleased that the Northern Growth Plan (**NGP**) is moving forward with many of the underlying principles that were identified in **NOSDA's Position Paper on the Northern Growth Plan (2009)**. **NOSDA** and its members are valuable resources and potential partners in the implementation of the **NGP**. However, several key areas must be taken into account as the process moves forward. We **recommend**:

- **EQUITY ACROSS THE NORTH**

The NGP must be applied in an integrated manner across the North to take advantage of instances of natural growth and ensure that social and economic infrastructure is significantly strengthened over time. The integrated implementation of the NGP would be well-guided by representative stakeholder leadership from all urban, suburban and rural geographies; the private and public sectors, native and Métis leaders, as well as sectoral leadership.

- **EARLY LEARNING AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

Early Learning investments that have already been made – ‘Best Start’ for example - need to be supported and enhanced to ensure that infrastructure for growing families are in place.

- **GREATER COMMITMENT TO NORTHERN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Barriers to training and education keep people from the training, education and ultimately, the jobs they need. There are skills and trade shortages across the North, particularly in the human services, that could be trained and kept employed locally (e.g. culturally appropriate Early Childhood Educators or Personal Support Workers to address the needs of an aging population). Municipal Service Managers could facilitate the development of local qualified trainers to assist in skills training or upgrading, and could facilitate linkages between clients, educational facilities and employers to provide clients with valuable employment experience. Planning for the unemployed whether or not they are on social assistance should be undertaken in an inclusive, coordinated and proactive way. This planning should systemically include Municipal Service Managers, along with Employment Ontario and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities across the North, to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

Further, there needs to be a greater commitment to investment in Northern post-secondary education. This investment must include research centres (university- and college-based) to foster the development of Northern Ontario innovation that will grow a new economy and new jobs for the North. This could support innovation in the traditional sectors but the strategy should not preclude new development in emerging sectors such as information technology, green technologies etc.

- **INVESTMENT IN HOUSING AS INFRASTRUCTURE**

Social housing is recognised as infrastructure. NOSDA member organizations are responsible for social housing in their respective catchment areas. Further, as identified in the *Places to Grow* legislation, upper and single tier municipalities need to develop housing strategies. That speaks directly to municipal service managers. Social Housing as infrastructure is discussed in detail in another recent NOSDA paper entitled *Improving the Housing System in Northern Ontario (2009)*.

In boom areas, there is a lack of affordable housing. In de-populating areas there is a modest surplus of it. However, it was recognized by a number of DSSAB's that there is an underinvestment in social housing in Northern Rural Ontario, and that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as the Federal Government need to get back into the funding side of housing because the local property tax base cannot sustain the significant increases in costs especially once mortgages and debentures are paid off, given the very difficult economic times Northern Ontario has been under for a much longer period than the rest of the province. It was also recognised there is a lack of affordable housing and no private sector involvement in social housing development in many areas of Northern Ontario, and that this is a significant need.

- **RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE**

Social Services infrastructure must be better identified and further integrated into the NGP. Social service infrastructure provides a base upon which the people of Northern Ontario can rely on in difficult times of cyclical economic downturn, and provides a means by which the people of Northern Ontario can integrate or re-integrate into the labour force.

- **ELIMINATE LEGISLATIVE, POLICY AND PROGRAM ANOMALIES**

Legislative anomalies between various Ministries' policies and programs and between the various levels of government that affect their equitable delivery across the North will need to be assessed and addressed through the Provincial – Municipal Fiscal And Services Review follow-up work currently underway.

- **CREATION OF SOLUTION TEAMS**

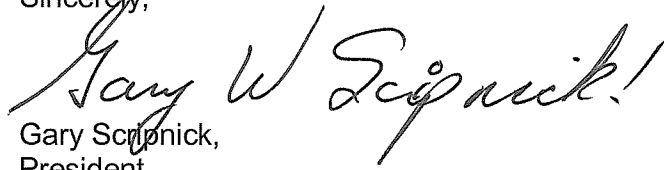
'Solution Teams' consisting of appropriate stakeholders be established to address resolvable issues; this will help create momentum and credibility. Our members would be pleased to participate in these Solution Teams.

While the Draft Northern Growth Plan lacks detail in relation to what will be specifically done in terms of economic development or renewal, we would welcome the opportunity to participate in discussions and decisions concerning regional economic planning and regional service delivery, as identified in the NGP report. Further, we would appreciate being kept informed and consulted throughout the implementation process and in the development of the next iteration of the Northern Growth Plan.

We will be inviting you and members of your Ministry to the **NOSDA Annual General Meeting** in April, 2010 to discuss how we can work together to ensure strong social infrastructure and a stronger Northern Ontario, in the context of the Northern Growth Plan. We truly welcome your positive response.

With our very best Season's Greetings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary W Scribnick!". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Gary Scribnick,
President

cc: Cal MacDonald, ADM, Northern Development, Mines and Forestry
Brad Graham, ADM, Growth Secretariat, Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure