Request:

The Province has adopted a very aggressive change agenda. The scope, volume and short implementation timeline for these changes is creating significant operational and financial challenges for municipalities.

The Township of Selwyn requests that the Province consider the following as it pursues its current proposals for change and any additional changes being considered.

1. Early and thorough consultations regarding proposed changes with municipalities, and the organizations representing them (e.g. AMO, ROMA, AMCTO etc…), should be conducted. The current pace, volume and scope of change is unmanageable for municipalities both financially and operationally, ie. too much too fast.

2. Recognize the significant differences between urban and rural municipalities and develop policies appropriate to reflect the same, ie. “one size does not fit all”.

3. Adopt fiscal neutrality as a core principle when considering changes. Municipalities do not have the appropriate revenue tools to absorb further downloading without significant impacts on the services being provided to its ratepayers.

Background:

The Province has embarked on an aggressive change agenda. With limited staff resources, keeping up with the volume of proposed changes coming in such a short period of time – from being able to respond to requests for comments on proposals, to implementation, to dealing with the financial impacts – is unmanageable. This situation is impacting our ability to provide the day to day services that our residents, businesses and visitors have come to expect. The changes will have significant financial implications which will ultimately limit our ability to maintain service levels and manage the myriad of assets that municipalities are responsible for. To provide some context, below is a list of some of the major changes either completed or underway:

- Review of municipal governance structure
- Cancelling of the planned doubling of the Ontario Gas Tax transfers
- Re-structuring of ambulance services and merging of dispatch operations
- Re-structuring of Public Health Units (currently proposed from 35 to 10)
- Increases to the proposed local share of Public Health from a 25/75 split for cost shared programs and a 0/100 split for provincial programs to a 40/60 split for all programs
- Limits to the number of mandatory core services provided to municipalities by Conservation Authorities
- Eliminating $100 million of “top up” grants under the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF)
- Introducing a new Tourism Strategy with potential funding reductions to regional tourism agencies
• Reviewing funding levels under the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF)
• Changes to Development Charges likely to shift more of the cost of growth onto local ratepayers
• Erosion of municipal planning authority by re-introducing de nova hearings as part of the planning appeal process
• Funding cuts to Ontario Library Services impacting interlibrary loans
• Expanding the eligibility requirements for policing grants to include OPP without increasing funding
• Changes to Child Care and the Early Years program including but not limited to fee stabilization, wage enhancement, space expansion
• Bill 108 - legislative and regulatory changes to numerous Acts impacting municipalities

Local government has proven itself to be responsive, adaptable, effective and efficient in providing services to satisfy the needs of its residents in the face of ever changing public expectations and increasing downloading from the Province. However, the volume, scope and pace of the recent changes has become unmanageable. In simple terms, this is too much, too fast. The financial burden on the property tax base is becoming overwhelming and municipalities do not have the appropriate revenue tools to continue to absorb this downloading. In addition, the demands on the limited municipal staff resources to respond to and implement the volume of change are negatively impacting our ability to provide core services to our constituents.

In summary, the Township requests that the Province acknowledge and appreciate the limited resources afforded to municipalities to effectively respond to these changes while maintaining levels of service. The Township urges the Province to recognize the significant limitations on the property tax base to absorb additional costs and further downloading. The Province needs to slow down on the proposed changes and provide time for thorough review of policies, consultation with stakeholders, appropriate implementation timelines and availability of appropriate revenue tools to manage financial impacts.