

# FINANCE MINISTER DWIGHT DUNCAN SUPPORT FOR SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT FUND

## ***Information Courtesy of SWEA:***

Ontario finance minister Dwight Duncan has indicated his government supports the creation of a Southwestern Ontario Development Fund.

Duncan voiced his support for the SWEA proposal during the annual ministers forum at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference in London. During the public forum, attended by over 1,000 municipal delegates, the minister gave a simple but emphatic answer of “yes” in response to a request put forward by SWEA chair and Stratford mayor Dan Mathieson.

Minister Duncan’s public support echoes support voiced by other ministers during private meetings with municipal delegations during the four day conference. Several SWEA members and partners raised the proposal during their delegations and many report a growing support for the idea.

SWEA launched its proposal at AMO as a means of establishing it as a key election issue for the region during the upcoming election. Support will be sought from both opposition leaders. The proposal specifically asks that the fund be in place within 100 days of the Oct. 6 provincial election.

Prior to releasing its proposal, SWEA sought the support of other influential stakeholder groups in the region. Endorsements were received from the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus, the South Central Ontario Region (SCOR) and the Southwestern Ontario Marketing Alliance (SOMA).

“The coming together of all of these groups was absolutely instrumental in getting early government support for this proposal,” says SWEA president Serge Lavoie. “We’ve been told over and over that the region’s municipalities and organizations must come together and speak with one voice to become more effective. We did that with this proposal and the results speak for themselves.”

Over the coming weeks SWEA will seek the support of other key stakeholders in the region, including colleges, universities, business groups and social enterprise. Following the election, SWEA plans to organize a Queens Park day to brief MPPs and ministers on the opportunities and challenges facing the region.

## **SWEA and WOWC ratify strategic partnership**

The Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (WOWC) and the Southwest Economic Alliance (SWEA) have formally ratified a strategic partnership by signing a memorandum of understanding at the AMO conference in London. WOWC chair and Middlesex County warden Joanne Vanderheyden, and SWEA chair and Stratford mayor Dan Mathieson put pen to paper, sealing an agreement that was put in motion during the SWEA conference in June. States Vanderheyden, “The WOWC recognizes the importance of working with senior levels of government and supporting many other organizations in the creation of an economic recovery plan that will return Southwestern Ontario to prosperity. This new partnership with SWEA is a key part of our economic development vision.” SWEA has been seeking partnerships with all of the region’s key economic development organizations. A partnership memorandum was signed with the South Central Ontario Region (SCOR) this past June. The aim is to coordinate the responses to the region’s many opportunities and challenges. “Our partnership with the western wardens is a fantastic opportunity to build on the influence of our alliance of municipalities, colleges and universities, and private and social enterprise,” according to Mathieson. “This sends a strong message to all our stakeholders.” As an immediate demonstration of the importance of these partnerships, SWEA received endorsements for its proposal to create a provincial Southwestern Ontario Development Fund. That proposal is already receiving strong expressions of support from the provincial government.