

January 21, 2010

Mr. Cal McDonald, ADM
Draft Growth Plan for Northern Ontario
Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry
159 Cedar Street, Suite 601
Sudbury, Ontario
P3E 6A5

Dear Mr. McDonald

For 115 years, the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce has been an important stakeholder in the progress and development of Greater Sudbury and Northern Ontario.

The Sudbury chamber congratulates the government for selecting Northern Ontario as its second designated growth area under the *"Places to Grow Act"*. We believe a strategic plan that shares a common vision for economic growth could be the framework from which to build a strong, growing and prosperous North for decades to come.

Our organization has a membership of over 1,000 businesses and professionals, representing more than 27,000 employees throughout the community. As a consequence, we feel it necessary to offer a perspective on the proposed Northern Ontario Growth Plan that aims to improve and promote their long term interests.

While the government repeatedly asserts that the proposed Northern Ontario Growth Plan outlines the direction and steps necessary to fulfill the goal of an economically sustainable and diverse region, we believe that there are significant absences, particularly priorities, actions, funding, timeframes and key measureables, which, if left unaddressed, will undermine the ultimate purpose and successful outcome of the Plan.

Consequently, the chamber submits the following points for inclusion into the Plan:

- Recognizing that without the large commercial and industrial tax base that other regions have, northern municipalities are disproportionately relying on residential properties for the majority of their tax base revenue. Moreover, since mining property tax revenues are declining, allow the region through its municipal governments, to access a greater share of the wealth generated by the natural resources extracted and processed in the region to create a new and sustainable revenue source for municipalities;
- The Plan must address maintaining resources for processing in the north. The Ontario Government must be committed to protecting the north's resources and industries, and creating a more competitive business environment where investment and job creation can thrive;
- The north must maximize the value of our natural resources. The Plan must address the need for the government to demonstrate active support for increased value-added industry in the north and encourage more manufacturing or further processing of the natural resources extracted in Northern Ontario;
- Recognizing that the north has a higher percentage of older citizens than the provincial average, a consequence which will inevitably result in a situation whereby there is a lack of individuals available to replace those exiting the workforce, the Plan must make Northern Ontario a destination of choice

for immigrants. This must be accomplished by implementing attraction strategies and funding labour force integration in specific industries;

- Recognizing that the north is trending higher in its representation of elderly adults and that the province as a whole will soon need to deal with a majority of retiring baby boomers, the Plan must address funding programs aimed at expanding affordable housing and alternative level care system supports;
- Recognizing that the region is underserved in transportation linkages relative to other areas of the province and that a strong network of rail, roads, ports and airports will support the growth and development of Northern Ontario, the Plan should expand and prioritize high speed rail linkages between Northern and Southern Ontario. This entails revising the current rails schedule and relocating rail terminals. Similarly, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Greater Sudbury and North Bay should be part of that network. Furthermore, new port facilities could provide opportunities for economic development by making it easier to transport raw materials and finished goods from the north to markets around the world and to attract new industries. Additionally, upgrading highway infrastructure in Northern Ontario must remain a priority of the government. The completion of the four laning of Highway 11 between North Bay and Toronto, and Highway 69 between Sudbury and Toronto, are on the horizon. However other northern highways (Highway 17 West between Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie, Highway 144 North between Sudbury and Timmins, Highway 11 North between North Bay and Kirkland Lake, and Highway 17 West from Thunder Bay and the Manitoba border) are in desperate need of upgrades and must not be overlooked;
- Recognizing that the province is determined to fulfill the principles outlined in the Green Energy Act, the Plan should take advantage of the abundance of green energy sources in the north (biomass, water, wind and solar) and establish a world class *Green Energy Research and Policy Institute* in Greater Sudbury;
- Energy must be seen as an economic development tool for the north and not just an extractable resource to feed the demands of Southern Ontario. Without affordable power rates the Province of Ontario will continue to see industries that rely heavily on energy and their related jobs leave our province for more competitive jurisdictions. Rather than exporting the energy riches of Northern Ontario to the south, they should be contained in the north to attract economic development and employment opportunities for the north. Furthermore, the government should implement a preferred energy rate for heavy industries located in Northern Ontario;
- The Plan lacks any indicators for measuring success. There is a need for achievement timeframes, key performance indicators, and assigned responsibilities for each goal identified in the Plan;
- There needs to be a greater emphasis on regional approaches to development in the Plan rather than imposing a Southern Ontario fix for the north. The Plan identifies regional centres but is unclear on how each centre is represented in the Plan;
- The Plan identifies the allotment of \$3 billion over the next three years to implement the Plan's priorities; however, it is unclear whether or not this amount includes the \$2.5 billion already announced for hydro generation and transmission in Northern Ontario. Is this new investment dollars for the north or is it simply repackaging what has already been allotted in the budget?
- The Plan cannot be a 'snapshot-in-time' proposal but must be a living document that gets reviewed, assessed and updated on a periodic basis. It must have northern buy-in with northern control and ownership. It must adopt a 'growth for the north' attitude and seek more consultation from the north in the next review. It must also be able to survive political shifts and changes in government.

Ultimately, the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce remains encouraged and optimistic that the Plan will address these concerns when it is released in the spring. In the interim, we remain committed to assisting the province and look forward to future opportunities to share our views.

40 Elm Street, Suite 1, Sudbury, ON P3C 1S8
T: (705) 673-7133 F (705) 673-2944
E: cofc@sudburychamber.ca
W: www.sudburychamber.ca

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du Grand Sudbury

Sincerely,

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