

Great Lakes Day at Queen's Park

On Tuesday October 6th, 2015, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative held its first Great Lakes Legislative Day at Queen's Park in Toronto, Ontario. It was a busy day for the 25 local elected officials, who met with four cabinet ministers, two opposition parties, and the Lieutenant Governor. The day ended with a reception co-hosted by Ontario Minister of Finance Charles Sousa and the Cities Initiative.

Mayors, chairs and councilors met over dinner the previous Monday night to discuss priority issues to present to legislators. They rose bright and early the next morning to make their way to the main legislative building to meet a dozen members of Progressive Conservative caucus over breakfast. Many thanks to PC caucus chair Lisa Thompson and her staff for organizing the breakfast.

A handful of mayors then joined Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry Bill Mauro to discuss Asian Carp, phragmites, and nutrients entering the Great Lakes. The minister took a keen interest in pathways for Asian Carp to enter the lakes from the Chicago area.

Cities Initiative members then attended Question Period where they were acknowledged and warmly welcomed by Minister Mauro and a number of other MPPs.

After lunch, the mayors made their way over to the Frost Building for a meeting with Ontario Minister of Finance Charles Sousa. Minister Sousa, a shoreline member of parliament representing Mississauga South, participated actively in a wide ranging discussion on topics including climate change mitigation and cap and trade, Asian Carp, and nutrients entering the Great Lakes.

The mayors were graciously welcomed to the Lieutenant Governor offices in the main legislative building. Her Honour, Elizabeth Dowdeswell, gave the mayors a tour of her art exhibit, 'Identity: Art Inspired by the Great Lakes'. Her Honour spoke eloquently of the importance of forging a common identity for Ontarians, and how the Great Lakes unite us all.

The mayor then joined members of the New Democratic Party of Ontario for a discussion on the Great Lakes. Again, phosphorus loads, Asian Carp and Phragmites were part of the topics covered. Mayors also shared their concerns with the caucus members about climate change adaptation, wetlands and microbeads.

A smaller group of mayors joined Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Jeff Leal, for a discussion on phosphorus loadings entering the Great Lakes. The Minister emphasized the good work that the agricultural community has already done through environmental farm plans and the adoption of best practices. The issue of the spread of phragmites that interfere with crops was also discussed.

A final meeting of the day was held with Environment and Climate Change Minister Glen Murray. The Minister emphasized the importance of climate change to the Great Lakes. He expressed an interest in gathering local data on the Great Lakes.

The day was rounded out with a reception co-hosted by Minister Sousa and the Cities Initiative. Cities Initiative Chair Mitch Twolan welcomed MPPs, mayors and special invited guests, including a number of Great Lakes funders from Canada and the United States. The mayors were delighted to have the recently appointed US Consul General Juan Alsace join them. Consul General Alsace spoke briefly about his fondness for the Great Lakes, having grown up in Buffalo. Ministers Sousa and Murray also brought greetings from the Ontario Government.

Overall the day was a great success for the Cities Initiative. It raised the profile of the organization amongst legislators of all stripes and gave the mayors an opportunity to discuss pressing issues affecting the health of the Great Lakes first hand with key decision makers. It was also a social media success. Tweets about our Queen's Park Day were retweeted by mayors and ministers alike.

The Cities Initiative would like to express its sincere gratitude to Minister Charles Sousa and his staff for helping to organize the day and reception. It would also like to thank the many member mayors and other elected officials who participated in the day.

For those who participated in the day, we would welcome your comments on what worked well and what could be improved for our next Great Lakes Day at Queen's Park. Please send your comments to Laura Bretheim at laura.bretheim@glslcities.org.

To see the gallery of photos, media articles and materials presented to ministers from Great Lakes Day at Queen's Park, please visit our website at [www. glslcities.org/legislative-days](http://www.glslcities.org/legislative-days).