

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative 2011 Annual Meeting and Conference

June 15-17th, 2011 ~ Niagara Falls, Ontario



The 8th Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Annual Meeting and Conference was held in the Region of Niagara Ontario on June 15-17th, 2011 with the theme of “The Power of Shared Waters.” Regional Chairman Gary Burroughs hosted the three day event with the spectacular views of the Falls and our international border outside the door-step.



Laura Secord Secondary School Choir and Drum Line

The Annual Meeting kicked off Thursday morning with a rousing rendition of the national anthems of both countries performed by the Laura Secord Secondary School choir and drum line. After Chair Burroughs opened the meeting, U.S. Consul General Kevin Johnson highlighted the great power of the trade and cultural partnership between Canada and the United States.

Chair Denis Lapointe remarked on the great success of the organization over the past year and expressed his appreciation for having the opportunity to serve as Chair of the organization. Mayor Lapointe passed on the leadership to Mayor Brian McMullan of St. Catharines, while Mayor Tom Barrett of Milwaukee became the Vice-Chair and President Régis Labeaume of the Québec Metropolitan Community is the new Secretary/Treasurer.



David Ullrich, Mayor Denis Lapointe & Mayor Brian McMullan

During the membership meeting, ten resolutions were passed that dealt with issues of safe shipping to invasive species and increased investment in the lakes and river. To see all the resolutions, please visit www.glsccities.org/annual-meetings/2011.cfm#resolutions.

The first panel of the conference, was **Green CiTTS: High Returns on Blue Investments**, and it highlighted work our member mayors are doing on investing on green economic and environmental opportunities. Mayor Randy Hope of Chatham-Kent set the stage for the panel, and Mayor George Heartwell spoke to the green efforts in Grand Rapids and Mayor Régis Labeaume presented on the important investments in water protection in the Québec Metropolitan Community.

During lunch, the conference welcomed Ontario Minister of the Environment John Wilkinson. Minister Wilkinson announced the release of *Assessing the Economic Value of Protecting the Great Lakes Ecosystems*, a study completed by the Ontario government and supported by the Cities Initiative. The report highlights the high economic return from investing in various Great Lakes restoration efforts. For the full report, please visit: http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/subject/great_lakes/STDPROD_077648.

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Minister John Wilkinson

The midday press conference of the Cities Initiative membership focused on encouraging the Canadian and U.S. Federal Governments to make a bi-national, sustainable funding commitment to the Great Lakes. Mayor Brian McMullan noted that protecting and restoring the source of freshwater for 40 million people in Canada and the U.S. should be a priority to all orders of government.

The afternoon began with the panel ***Spills on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence – Are we Ready?***, a topic that has garnered great concern over the past year.



Spills Panel

Offering first-hand experience, Mayor Vance Badawey of Port Colborne Ontario moderated the panel and offered insight on a small oil spill in his community last summer. Mark Durno of the U.S. EPA provided his perspective regarding onsite incident command at the Kalamazoo River oil spill in Michigan last summer. U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Michael Parks and Assistant Commissioner Wade Spurrell of the Canadian Coast Guard provided information on measures

that are to deal with spills. Canadian Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Scott Vaughan presented his report on preparedness and response to environmental accidents in Canada.

With the success from last year's Mayor Exchange, once again mayors, municipal staff and other stakeholders split up into small groups to share experiences on creating a sustainable future for the region. The discussion topics included advancing renewable energy sources, efficiency and conservation; greening municipalities; climate change adaptation; and beaches.

To cap off a busy day, attendees were treated to an evening of cocktails and dinner at the new LEED certified Niagara Falls Convention Center. The gala reception featured local foods and good company.

Friday morning began with a visually impressive and powerful keynote address by Karel Mayrand, the Québec Director General of the David Suzuki Foundation. Mr. Mayrand expressed his passion for protecting our natural resources, especially the St. Lawrence River.

The first panel of the morning was ***Lessons for Cities on Shale Gas and Other Energy Exploration.*** With the rise of the shale gas industry in the Province of Québec as well as the eastern Great Lakes states, various perspectives were brought forth to help municipalities better understand the issue. Mayor Alan DeSousa of Montréal moderated the panel and provided a few anecdotes on his city's experience with shale gas. Kelly Burch of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection provided information on regulations in Pennsylvania with respect to shale gas extraction. Hope Henderson, Manager of Government and Industry relations from Talisman Energy, provided an industry viewpoint on the issue and Professor Norman Mousseau of the Université de Montréal rounded out the discussion with a technical perspective.

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Chair Lana Pollack

After the first panel, Lana Pollack, United States Chair of the International Joint Commission, delivered a keynote address covering a number of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence issues.

The final panel of the conference, **Cities In Action**, focused on the leadership of municipal government and the Niagara 10, a coalition of Niagara region officials. The panel included the Niagara 10 presentation of a plaque to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Boundary Waters Treaty.

At the end of the morning session, the Cities Initiative Executive Director David Ullrich and Deputy Director Nicola Crawhall, provided an overview of Cities Initiative activities over the past year and laid out plans for the next year of work.

The Cities Initiative Awards Luncheon brought the three day conference to a close. With the addition of the Green CiTTS program, a number of cities were recognized for their achievements over the past year. The **Wege Small Cities Sustainability Best Practices award** was given to the City of Sheboygan and Mayor Bob Ryan for efforts to take their wastewater treatment plant “off the grid”. Mayor Ryan proudly accepted the \$5,000 grant from the Wege Foundation. To round out the Wege award from the previous year, Mayor Larry MacDonald presented some of the great work from the City of Bayfield’s “Clean It, Green It” campaign.

The Cities Initiative Water Conservation Framework had a successful year with almost half of the thirty-three participants collectively achieving a 16 percent reduction in water use

within their cities. At the Awards Luncheon, the City of Toronto was recognized for most innovative water conservation method and the Town of The Blue Mountains was recognized for most progress on water conservation.

Three new awards were presented as part of the first priority area of the Green CiTTS (*Cities Transforming Towards Sustainability*) program. These awards were focused on stormwater management in our member cities. The City of Milwaukee was presented with the Leadership on Stormwater Management award. The City of Trois-Rivières was recognized for Innovation in Stormwater Management and the City of Montréal received the Progress on Stormwater Management award.



Mayor Alan DeSousa & Mayor Brian McMullan

With next year’s conference heading up the St. Lawrence River to Québec City, President Régis Labeaume of the Québec Metropolitan Community gave us a preview of what we have in store for the 2012 Annual Meeting and Conference of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. Regional Chair Gary Burroughs officially closed the 2011 Annual Meeting with a gracious farewell to all the attendees.

The Cities Initiative thanks Chair Gary Burroughs and all the staff from the Region of Niagara, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and the Niagara Parks Commission for their hospitality and hard work. The staff and membership looks forward to next year’s conference in Quebec City June 26-28th, 2012.