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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Release: 2018 ROMA Conference Draws Rural Leaders  
Focus on rural municipal priorities and needs

The Town of Smiths Falls Mayor Shawn Pankow along with Councillors Dawn Quinn and Chris Cummings joined more than 1,000 rural municipal officials from across the province at the 2018 Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference in Toronto from January 21 to 23.

The conference launched Monday morning with a keynote address by premier Kathleen Wynne where she featured Smiths Falls as a community re-inventing itself and on the rise. Delegates learned about the meteoric rise of Canopy Growth, le Boat's decision to re-locate their North American Headquarters in our town along with several other examples of the transition taking place within the local economy. A video clip will be played at the next Council meeting on February 5th at 5:00.

"I was pleasantly surprised to hear Premier Wynne single out Smiths Falls as a community on the rise" said Mayor Pankow. "Our council and staff go to work every day to do our part in moving this town forward and we feel good about the future of our community. It is rewarding to know that the premier recognized some of the positives in her opening remarks. I had an opportunity to thank her personally that evening and she was very complimentary of the progressive change happening in Smiths Falls. This is all very encouraging when we are in the process of seeking provincial grants for the redevelopment of Beckwith Street and are supporting Tweed's vision of opening a retail store at its production facility here."

The conference is a key opportunity for rural officials to raise local priorities with the provincial government, foster partnerships and learn about new opportunities. Funding municipal services and infrastructure continues to be a recurring a key theme, one that will be important heading into the provincial election.

Municipal governments face an estimated funding gap of \$4.9 billion annually for the next ten years, just to maintain current services and address infrastructure needs. Municipal governments and property taxpayers need to see a plan that helps reduce

this gap in a meaningful way. The conference was an opportunity for local leaders to press all three parties for solutions.

Key priorities for the Smiths Falls contingent were Connecting Links funding for the Beckwith Street rehabilitation project along with MPAC reforms to streamline property re-assessments and bring clarity and consistency to the methodologies employed by MPAC in assessing commercial properties.

Other highlights of the conference included:

- Speeches by all three party leaders, as well as a number of Ministers
- Ministers' forum where over 20 ministers and Premier answered questions of municipal concern from delegates
- Sessions on economic development matters, such as rural broadband, natural gas and autonomous vehicles.
- Critical challenges like rural schools and health care access
- The impacts on local services of cannabis legalization

Conference news releases, fact sheets and presentations from key speakers are posted on ROMA's website at [www.roma.on.ca](http://www.roma.on.ca).



Photo caption: Ron Holman, Chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) and Mayor of Rideau Lakes Township, addresses Premier Kathleen Wynne at the association's annual conference held in Toronto from January 21 to 23.

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Media Contact: Mayor Shawn Pankow, 613-283-4124 ext. 1110.

Box 695, 77 Beckwith St. N., Smiths Falls, Ontario K7A 4T6  
Phone: 613-283-4124 Fax: 613-283-4764 Website at [www.smithsfalls.ca](http://www.smithsfalls.ca).