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P-9

Journal des débats (Hansard)

P-9

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Subcommittee report

2022 Annual Report,
Auditor General:

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

Ministry of the Environment, Conservation
and Parks

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Ministry of Infrastructure

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Monday 3 April 2023

Comité permanent des comptes publics

Rapport du sous-comité

Rapport annuel 2022,
vérificatrice générale :

Ministère des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts

Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection
de la nature et des Parcs

Ministère des Affaires municipales et du Logement

Ministère de l'Infrastructure

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Lundi 3 avril 2023

Chair: Tom Rakocevic
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Président : Tom Rakocevic
Greffière : Tanzima Khan

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES COMPTES PUBLICS

Monday 3 April 2023

Lundi 3 avril 2023

The committee met at 1233 in room 151.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order.

First on the agenda today, we have a subcommittee report. Can I please have one of the subcommittee members read the report into the record? I recognize MPP Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Your subcommittee on committee business met on March 30, 2023, and recommends the following:

(1) That the following selections of the subcommittee be revoked:

—Section 4.02, Health Human Resources, 2015 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario;

—Section 3.01, Child and Youth Mental Health, 2016 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario;

And that they be replaced by the following sections from the 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario:

—Value-for-Money Audit, Financial Services Regulatory Authority: Regulation of Private Passenger Automobile Insurance, Credit Unions and Pension Plans;

—Value-for-Money Audit, Ontario Energy Board: Electricity Oversight and Consumer Protection;

(2) That two additional sections from the 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario be selected for review as follows:

—Value-for-Money Audit, Conserving the Niagara Escarpment;

—Value-for-Money Audit, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.: Casinos, Lotteries and Internet Gaming;

(3) That there be three rounds of questions for all hearings, unless otherwise agreed upon by the committee.

So moved.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: There may be a proposed amendment to the last item, number 3. I believe Mr. Bouma has the motion to amend item 3 in the motion.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): MPP Bouma?

Mr. Will Bouma: Member McCarthy is always jumping the gun. There we go. Yes, I would like to—through you, Chair—move an amendment to the subcommittee report,

just striking “three” and replacing that with “two” rounds of questions.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate on the amendment? MPP Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I see no reason to reduce the number of rounds of questioning of witnesses. If this committee is going to do its work thoroughly, the ability to actually dig in is important. As we all are well aware, from time to time, there are ministries that tend to extend their comments without putting a lot of content in, so sometimes it takes a while to pull the tooth. I would say that we keep the three.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: I wouldn't disagree with the member. However, typically, we get all relevant questions answered by all sides within two rounds. I think two rounds is appropriate. I think the committee could make the motion on the floor to add more rounds if they felt that was necessary based on what was going on—so making more rounds the exception rather than the rule. But I'm willing to acquiesce to whatever the vote is.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): MPP Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have been on this committee for a long time, and I would suggest that we keep it at three but certainly agree among ourselves when we only want two and when the work is done. But to set out as three rounds—really, three rounds is two hours. It's not that much of our time to ask sometimes pretty big, big audits. Each of us would have an hour to question a witness. Sometimes it goes by really fast. I can tell you that when Dr. Mazza was here for Ornge, to get him to say hello took a good hour. And for others who really did not want to talk to us, it took us a long time before we got anything out of them.

Today—Todd, are you okay with this?—Todd came to me and said, “For today, it would be better if we only did two.” He came, he talked to us, we moved on, and that's fine. But I think as the committee, we should aim for three. If something happens that we only need two or whatever, then we can do that on the fly—but keep the minutes of the committee as they are and deal with shorter or longer as a one-off, when it comes up.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP McCarthy.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: The purpose of this is, where appropriate, we can have more rounds if the committee agrees for a particular digging-in process—so it never

precludes it, but this is the rule of thumb, this is the intent of the amendment, as I understand it.

I do thank the member for her comments. Obviously, this committee is working together. That's why we have, generally, the protocol that we sit amongst each other rather than by party, and it's something that I think is important.

I did speak to the member, and we did have the consensus that for today, two rounds should be sufficient.

I might add, in terms of the history of previous Parliaments, my understanding is that this committee used to meet on a Wednesday. Now that we meet on a Monday, we have more time for digging in, to use member Tabuns's phrase.

Two is agreed to be sufficient for today. Two should be the rule of thumb, and if we need more, we can always make an exception in a particular case.

Those are my submissions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Any further debate on the amended motion?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'd just like to add a concern. If we're working on a "consensus," which is the word MPP McCarthy used, I think the idea of leaving it at three rounds, and then in committee, by consensus—if we feel that we have exhausted the questions that we need to ask, then by consensus at committee we could vote amongst ourselves not to have three rounds. But to limit it to two rounds, particularly when some of these reports that come from the Auditor General are significant and are of significant impact for the people of the province of Ontario—I imagine that they expect us to do our job and that we couldn't anticipate ahead of time if our job could be done in two rounds.

For example, when we had reports that were related to the hydro file under the previous Liberals, with Kathleen Wynne, those were important issues that would require more than two rounds of questioning. And look what we uncovered there. We ended up having to have a special committee just to address those issues.

So I'm opposed to limiting it to three rounds—not opposed, by consensus, as MPP McCarthy said in committee, to decide that we don't need two rounds, but particularly when the witnesses now are three a piece, I believe. So we're really shortchanging ourselves and, I would say, shortchanging the people of the province of Ontario in doing our job, which is to be diligent and ask important questions on their behalf.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate?

Mr. Will Bouma: Those are all the reasons why I think two rounds is enough. We can add them by consensus. I know when we tried to do it by consensus in a previous meeting not too long ago, one of the opposition members, rather than agreeing with that consensus, decided to use language that was deemed insulting by one of my colleagues. That's why I think two rounds is enough. We'll make that the standard, and then we can add more rounds by consensus, so we can avoid that sort of a situation again.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? But soon we'll have to move on because we have the AG.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Both MPP Bouma and MPP McCarthy said we can decide by consensus, going forward. So do I

have it, then, on the record that there will not be a vote on whether we extend a two-round to a three-round? Is that what we're hearing—that we're not voting and that they won't be using the majority; that we will decide amongst ourselves to extend it to three rounds, if we determine that's necessary? Is that what you mean by consensus?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Again, through you, Chair: That would depend on the attitude of the opposition on the day.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Chair, I wasn't on the committee previously, and I don't know that what I perceive as a threat that we behave ourselves or we won't be working by consensus is a good way to start this committee.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I think we should put it to a vote.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Are members ready to vote on the amendment?

Mr. Will Bouma: Yes, Chair.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Recorded vote, please, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Okay.

Ayes

Bouma, Byers, Crawford, Cuzzetto, Kanapathi, McCarthy, Skelly, Laura Smith.

Nays

McMahon, Shaw, Tabuns.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): It carries.

Shall we vote on the subcommittee report, as amended? All those in favour? All those opposed? It carries.

We'll now be moving into closed session to receive a briefing from the Auditor General. This committee is now in recess for five minutes so we can properly move into closed session.

The committee recessed at 1243 and resumed at 1353, following a closed session.

2022 ANNUAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND FORESTRY

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT,
CONSERVATION AND PARKS

MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS
AND HOUSING

MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Consideration of value-for-money audit: Climate Change Adaptation: Reducing Urban Flood Risk.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): I would like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. We are here to begin consideration of value-for-

money audit Climate Change Adaptation: Reducing Urban Flood Risk, from the 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General.

Joining us today are officials from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry; the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks; and the Ministry of Infrastructure. You will have 20 minutes collectively for an opening presentation to the committee. We will then move into the question-and-answer portion of the meeting, where we will rotate back and forth between the government and official opposition caucuses in 20-minute intervals, with some time for questioning allocated for the independent member.

Before you begin, the Clerk will administer the oath of witness or affirmation.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Good afternoon. I will start with the oaths on the Bible.

Mr. Imbrogno, you've got a Bible in front of you. Do you solemnly swear that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Thank you.

Ms. Alexander, do you solemnly swear that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Thank you.

Now, I will do the affirmations for our other two deputy ministers here. The affirmations will be done together, so I will read out the affirmation and then both of your mikes will be turned on, and if you could just say that you affirm. Thank you.

Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Yes.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): I would invite each of you to introduce yourselves for Hansard before you begin speaking. You may begin when ready. Thank you so much for being here.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Good afternoon. I'm Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark. I'm the deputy minister for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Good afternoon, Auditor General, Chair and members of the standing committee. I'm pleased to address the Standing Committee on Public Accounts as part of your discussions on the findings of the audit and provide information as well as answer any questions you may have about our ongoing work with respect to managing flood risk.

I'd like to take a moment to introduce members of my executive team who have joined me today both in person

and virtually to help answer your questions related to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's mandate to manage flood hazards. With me here today is Jennifer Keyes, who's a director in our policy division, sitting here with us. And joining me on the line are Craig Brown, our assistant deputy minister for policy division; Tracey Mill, our assistant deputy minister for provincial services division; and Jennifer Barton, our assistant deputy minister of regional operations division.

I would like to begin by thanking the auditor and her team for their review of the value-for-money audit Climate Change Adaptation: Reducing Urban Flood Risk from the 2022 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

Before you get into your questions, I'd like to take this opportunity to talk to you about the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's role in managing flooding and tell you about the work we are doing at the MNRF to help prepare for and reduce the risk of floods in Ontario.

Ontario's approach to managing risks associated with flooding involves a series of acts, regulations, policies and technical guides implemented through partnerships with several provincial ministries, municipalities and conservation authorities. MNRF's role in managing flooding focuses primarily on preparedness, mitigation and early warning activities and working in partnership with local conservation authorities, municipalities and Indigenous communities to minimize flood emergencies.

The ministry provides surface water monitoring and flood messaging to conservation authorities, Indigenous communities and our own MNRF districts, as well as municipalities. Policies are provided through the provincial policy statement and the Conservation Authorities Act to direct development away from flood plains and other hazardous areas. MNRF also provides support to Indigenous communities in the Far North during spring flooding by conducting river surveillance flights and arranging evacuation and return flights for communities facing flood risks.

We continue to expand our knowledge, learning and efforts. Extensive flooding in lakes and rivers in 2019 led to the appointment of a special adviser on flooding tasked with reviewing Ontario's flood mitigation framework and opportunities for improvement. In response to his findings, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry coordinated the development of Protecting People and Property: Ontario's Flooding Strategy, outlining over 90 actions to be taken by various ministries over the next few years to increase Ontario's resiliency to flooding. Many of these actions have already been initiated and completed, while others will take more time.

Many of the recommendations provided by the Auditor General reiterate or build upon the actions outlined within Ontario's Flooding Strategy. As an example, the flooding strategy commits the province to enhance flood mapping in Ontario. Protecting people and property is supported through the identification of flood hazard areas, so the MNRF launched the Flood Hazard Identification and Mapping Program in August 2022. The program will advance flood risk reduction by working with the federal

government to invest up to \$7.6 million in the creation and updating of flood mapping in Ontario over the next year. This funding is being made available to Indigenous communities, conservation authorities and municipalities. Identifying flood hazard areas plays an important role in reducing risks to people and property, and more accurate maps will better prepare us for future flooding while reducing long-term disaster assistance costs for the province.

The ministry has also worked to improve public awareness of flood risks and encourage homeowners to take steps to reduce the impacts of flooding by providing helpful information on ontario.ca/floods and promoting it on various ministry social channels.

In December 2021, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry approved a new provincial elevation mapping program to support the collection of high-quality elevation data across Ontario. This program will collect important data suitable for flood mapping, which can help inform municipalities and the public regarding which locations are at potentially higher risk of flooding.

Most recently, in March of this year, in advance of this year's season, my ministry provided an updated flooding tool kit to all MPPs containing information to help their constituents better prepare for flooding.

I'll conclude my remarks by once again thanking you for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and introduce my colleague Deputy Minister Serge Imbrogno from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Thanks, Monique. For the record, I'm Serge Imbrogno, deputy minister of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. I am joined here today by members of my senior executive team, who will help provide more details on any questions you may have related to the mandate of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

My senior management team consists of Alex Wood, ADM of the climate change and resiliency division; Chloe Stuart, ADM of the land and water division; Lisa Trevisan, ADM of the environmental assessment and permissions division; and Steven Carrasco, ADM of the drinking water and environmental compliance division.

1400

To begin, I'd like to thank the Auditor General for her observations and recommendations from her value-for-money audit *Climate Change Adaptation: Reducing Urban Flood Risk*. MECP is considering the Auditor General's report and recommendations. The mandate for managing floods and hazards rests with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and, by extension, conservation authorities. Conservation authorities working with municipalities have been delegated the responsibility to reduce the risk of flooding, which is assessed during land use planning activities undertaken prior to infrastructure design.

At the same time, MECP has continued to work collaboratively with our partner ministries and other levels of government as it relates to each of our mandates to help address and mitigate risk of urban flooding in Ontario. MECP plays an important role in Ontario's resiliency

efforts, including assessing climate change risks from increased precipitation. The ministry also provides guidance on policy and stormwater management and low-impact development initiatives to ensure municipal stormwater approvals are protective of the environment and water quality remains safeguarded.

The ministry is fulfilling this mandate in several ways. To better understand and prepare for future climate impacts, such as extreme precipitation, the ministry launched a multi-sector provincial-level climate change impact assessment in 2022 led by the Climate Risk Institute. Over 130 organizations were invited to participate in engagement sessions held with subject matter experts from municipalities, business, industry and environmental organizations, as well as Indigenous organizations, other ministries and other entities. The assessment is currently being reviewed by the ministry and its partner ministries.

MECP's role in stormwater management approvals is to ensure surface water bodies and the environment are protected from adverse impacts. These systems have to meet design criteria established by this ministry and any performance criteria set by the municipality or conservation authority. The conservation authorities and municipalities may establish criteria for discharge from stormwater management systems to reduce the risk of flooding. The role of this ministry in reviewing applications for stormwater management systems is to ensure these criteria can be met, not whether those criteria will effectively reduce the risk of flooding. That responsibility continues to rest with the conservation authority and the municipality.

The ministry is taking steps to make municipalities more accountable for stormwater management systems by moving to a consolidated linear infrastructure approach for municipal sewage works. This new approach makes municipalities more accountable for the management of their stormwater management systems, making sure they continue to function as designed, which helps reduce the risk of flooding. This new approach has built in a renewal cycle, which will allow the ministry to incorporate up-to-date environmental protection measures as needed.

To help municipalities, property owners, planners, developers and others better manage stormwater runoff, the ministry developed a draft *Low Impact Development Stormwater Management Guidance Manual*. The draft manual was posted on the Environmental Registry of Ontario last year, where it received comments from many organizations and individuals, including from municipalities, conservation authorities, developers, non-governmental organizations and the public. This ministry is reviewing, analyzing and considering those comments. The manual aims to provide best practices for managing rain where it falls, helping to reduce flood risks.

To further protect the health of our communities and water resources in Ontario, last year the ministry also released a waste water and stormwater management discussion paper. It sought input on the rules, policies and new approaches that would make it easier for Ontario communities to improve how waste water and stormwater are managed, including approved climate change adaptation practices.

Last year, the ministry also created the improving Lake Ontario waste water and stormwater discharge program. Through this program, the ministry is investing \$15 million over two years to help 18 municipalities in the Lake Ontario basin improve aging and outdated stormwater infrastructure. Municipalities are using this funding to build stormwater infrastructure, upgrade sewers and pumping stations, clean out debris from stormwater management ponds and put green stormwater infrastructure in place. The ministry is planning to invest an additional \$30 million to expand this program over the next three years.

In addition, the ministry's Wetlands Conservation Partner Program, established in 2020, is providing \$30 million to help conservation organizations create and restore wetlands to support municipalities with stormwater management in priority areas across our province. In the first two years of the program, this funding helped our conservation partners restore more than 1,700 hectares of wetlands through 180 projects. These initiatives will help prevent flooding in the Great Lakes watershed and connecting waterways.

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks will continue to fulfill its mandate and work cooperatively with our partner ministries and other levels of government to mitigate the risk of urban flooding in Ontario. I look forward to answering any questions you might have regarding how MECP is fulfilling its mandate on this important subject. Thank you.

Now, it's over to Kate.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Thank you, Serge.

My name is Kate Manson-Smith, and I'm the deputy minister at municipal affairs and housing. Before my brief remarks, I too will take the opportunity to introduce some colleagues who may assist with answers. I have with me today Helen Collins, who is the director of the municipal programs and education branch; Sean Fraser, who is the ADM of the planning and growth division; Barb Adderley, in that division, who is a manager of planning innovation; and Mansoor Mahmood, Ontario's chief building official and the director of the buildings branch at municipal affairs and housing.

Thank you, Chair and committee. I'll speak just for a few minutes about the role of municipal affairs and housing in the flood prevention space. The role that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing plays is essential to fulfilling the government's mandate to work with local governments and partners across various sectors to build safe and strong urban and rural communities. I'm pleased to provide an update on the initiatives under way at the ministry to reduce the risk of urban flooding in Ontario while also encouraging municipalities to take action to protect communities from the impacts of extreme weather events such as flooding.

I'd like to highlight three areas of the ministry's work that support the objective of reducing urban flooding. Those are building standards, provincial land use planning policy and disaster recovery assistance.

I'll start with design and construction of buildings in Ontario. The Ontario building code, which is actually a regulation under the Building Code Act, provides minimum standards for the construction of new buildings and

for major renovations of existing buildings. The code establishes high standards for construction to minimize the risk to the health and safety of the public and address fire safety, accessibility and structural sufficiency, as well as ensuring building integrity and performance, and promoting water and energy conservation. The province's building code is updated regularly to reflect technological advancements, expert research and government priorities, as well as input from stakeholders.

In the fall of 2021, we launched a three-phase consultation process with the public, municipalities and partners in the building and development sector on proposed updates to be included in the next edition of the building code. We're currently reviewing that feedback, and aim to release an updated building code in the summer of 2023.

Under the Construction Codes Reconciliation Agreement, Ontario has also committed to increasing harmonization of the province's building code with the national construction code. The National Research Council is currently developing proposals for a 2025 national code, and once approved, Ontario will consider changes for inclusion in the provincial building code.

I'll speak next to the province's land use planning policies. Last fall, the government introduced More Homes Built Faster, the third in a series of action plans to increase Ontario's housing supply. To support the new plan, MMAH launched a consultation on a housing-focused policy review of A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, as well as the provincial policy statement, which is a province-wide document. The policies in these documents provide the objectives and overarching rules for decision-making in land use planning in Ontario. The ministry sought input on how to create a streamlined, province-wide land use planning policy framework that enables municipalities to approve housing faster and increase supply, while also conserving resources and protecting the environment.

It's important to note that the provincial policy statement, sometimes referred to as the PPS, reflects the mandates of more than 17 provincial ministries. The policies are high-level and outcome-oriented to provide for flexibility in implementation locally. Planning authorities may set their own rules on future development based on local conditions and guidance that is provided by the province. Natural hazards, climate-change-adaptation and infrastructure-planning policies will continue to be important parts of the provincial planning policy to ensure that development is directed away from lands that might be subject to flooding and other risks to public safety.

We're working closely with our ministry partners, some of whom are here today, to determine how policies within their spheres will guide land-use planning in the future. We'll also be considering input from the public as well as, of course, the Auditor General's recommendations under discussion today.

1410

Last but not least, with respect to disaster recovery assistance, we as a ministry provide support for recovery from sudden, unexpected and costly natural disasters as the changing climate continues to affect Ontario's communities.

We're doing this through two programs, the disaster recovery assistance program and the Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance Program.

Additionally, we have launched a Build Back Better pilot project, in 2019, and extended that program to March 2023. That's a program that's within the Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance Program. Under this pilot program, up to \$1 million each year helps to protect communities from the repeated impacts of natural disasters, including funding, by providing additional funds to rebuild municipal infrastructure in a natural disaster to a higher standard.

The ministry is also completing its administration of the National Disaster Mitigation Program in Ontario to provide municipalities, conservation authorities and other eligible recipients with access to federal funding for flood mapping, flood mitigation projects and other things that will help reduce Ontario's flood risks.

I'll close by emphasizing that we look forward to continuing to collaborate with the ministries here with us today, as well as others.

I'll turn things over to my colleague.

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Thank you so much, Deputy Manson-Smith.

Good afternoon. I'm Carlene Alexander. I'm the deputy minister of the Ministry of Infrastructure. I'm also joined by some colleagues today who may help answer some questions, in particular colleagues from the infrastructure program design and delivery division: Jill Vienneau is the ADM of that division, Trevor Fleck is a director in that division and Malumir Logan is a manager in that division. I'm also joined by Rachel Traoré-Takura, who is my executive adviser, as well as my director of comms, Lidia Piccolo. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.

Municipalities own a significant portion of Ontario's core infrastructure assets, and these assets provide critical services. Municipalities are required to create asset management plans in accordance with the asset management planning for municipal infrastructure regulation, O. Reg. 588/17, under the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015.

By July 2025, municipalities are required to have comprehensive asset management plans that reflect the full portfolio of their local infrastructure. The goal of this regulation is to build on the progress municipalities have made in making well-informed evidence-based decisions and promote a greater degree of standardization and consistency in asset management planning all while recognizing the unique circumstances and infrastructure needs across municipalities.

Municipal asset management plans set out information on the current state of the municipal infrastructure assets as well as how municipalities intend to manage these assets over the longer term. They can help municipalities identify local infrastructure needs and potential funding shortfalls and improve long-term financial planning for necessary upgrades.

Stormwater infrastructure is one of the asset categories included in asset management plans. Asset management

plans reflect the resilience of stormwater infrastructure to major rainfall events, contributing to municipalities' resilience to urban flooding.

Currently, the province, in partnership with the Municipal Finance Officers' Association, is supporting municipalities in meeting the requirements of the regulation. Together, we have continued to provide asset management tools and supports to municipalities through the AMP It Up Program, which includes:

- coaching and assistance: that is one-on-one consulting for Ontario's smallest municipalities, with a population of less than 5,000, to help them meet regulatory timelines;

- group workshops: those are detailed workshops on various topics to help municipalities complete the work required to comply with the regulation; and then,

- communities of practice: cohort-based working groups that will enhance knowledge sharing and collaboration between municipalities with similar infrastructure needs—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Sorry, Deputy Minister. We're at time.

Do I have consensus of the committee to allow the deputy minister to proceed to finish her presentation? Yes. Please proceed.

Ms. Carlene Alexander: I'm almost done—cohort-based working groups that will enhance knowledge sharing and collaboration between municipalities with similar infrastructure needs and help incentivize municipalities to work together achieve common goals.

MOI is undertaking work to conduct quality assurance of municipal asset management plans, including working with third-party quality assurance and advisory services. Through this review, the ministry will assess data gaps and review municipal reporting and metrics, and revise or expand the guidance documents and the AMP It Up Program already provided to the sector.

Thank you very much for allowing me that extra time.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you all very much for your presentations.

We will proceed this week in this following rotation: 20 minutes to the official opposition members, 20 minutes to the government members and three minutes to the independent member. We will follow this for two rounds.

We now begin with the official opposition. I recognize MPP Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much, Chair, and Deputy Ministers, thank you very much for your presentations. When I address you all, I'll use your last names. If I pronounce them incorrectly, feel free to correct me, because I don't like massacring people's names.

I'll go first to Mr. Imbrogno. We've had a long relationship in this room over the decade now.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: And you pronounced my name correctly.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Practice, practice. One of the things I want to start on before we get into the detailed report: When you're doing an evaluation of where we're going to be in the next decade or two decades in terms of the weather conditions we're facing, does your ministry use IPCC scenarios?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Thank you for the question. We did our recent provincial climate impact assessment report. It was based on a regional perspective of Ontario. The actual assumptions that went into how the weather would change, I don't think, were necessarily based specifically on that because it was specific to Ontario and our regions. So we used the best available science we had to think about what the regional impact is for Ontario. I don't think it's linked directly to the IPCC report that you're referring to.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Can you tell us what temperature you're assuming Ontario or the world will reach in a decade or two decades, which will dictate the kind of weather conditions we're going to deal with?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: We're not questioning that report. I think what we're saying when we're applying it to Ontario—it's a different methodology for what we did in the impact assessment for Ontario.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Can I assume that when we see the climate assessment, we'll see the basis upon which they have done the projection?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Yes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That climate change assessment was due last year, and then I understood it was going to be out in the spring. When will it be available to us?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: It was an extensive report, as you know. We had 18 ministries participate. We had 130 organizations. It was across all regions.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes, you said that earlier.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Part of the challenge was that during the pandemic, it got delayed a bit, and because it was so extensive, it got delayed. So we did receive the final report I think early in 2023. We've shared that with ministries. We're internally reviewing it at this point, but I don't have a time for when that will be released. It's under internal review at this point.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Do you expect that it will be released this year?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: I don't want to make that commitment to you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Will it be released before the next election?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: I don't want to make that commitment to you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I look forward to asking the minister that question. Okay. Thank you.

To the Ministry of Infrastructure—Ms. Alexander. One of the things that was noted in the report by the Auditor General was that urban flooding presents significant future cost risk to governments and taxpayers. The AG noted the findings of the Financial Accountability Office talking about the impact of climate change hazards, and the FAO recommended investing now in making sure that our infrastructure is able to deal with the far more extreme weather that we're going to deal with in the future. How are those projections reshaping your capital planning?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Thank you very much for the question. I will start, and then I'll maybe turn it over to Jill Vienneau, my ADM, to add, if necessary.

I'll first start off by talking about some of the investments that we have made. We do recognize that investments are

needed in this area. We do have a few different programs that we have used to invest in stormwater in particular.

I'll start off by talking about our program which we call OCIF, which is the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. This particular program provides funding for 425 eligible small, in particular, rural and northern communities, and provides stable and predictable funding. So this program has increased—it has doubled in size—over the past couple of years and will result in \$1 billion of additional funding over the next five years. Prior to 2022, the program was \$200 million a year. In 2022 and 2023, it's now \$400 million. So that is one particular area. And in particular, there has been \$59 million approved to date which funded 70 different projects around stormwater, so it directly addresses urban flooding. That's one program.

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The other program that I'll talk about is called ICIP, Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. As part of that program, there is a green stream, and through that particular green stream, there are programs focused on water, waste water and stormwater infrastructure. To date, \$66 million has been invested in water-related programs in 13 particular projects. We have also invested in the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, which has provided funding for 335 stormwater infrastructure projects, including \$66 million.

The other thing that I will talk about is that the asset management plans that we're working with municipalities to develop will help us to have a better view of what needs exist in municipalities, because their asset management plans will look at where the greatest needs are to prevent risks from happening in the future and to ensure that resilience. So we will have information on how municipalities are investing in their core infrastructure, including water infrastructure. Municipalities are required to have full asset management plans in place by 2025. We will be hiring a third-party adviser to help us to assess those plans to determine where the risks might still exist and how municipalities may have to prioritize some of their funding in infrastructure to address the risk that exists around stormwater.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So the report of the FAO is suggesting that we're going to have to invest more in this infrastructure than we have in the past. The Auditor General notes that the investments that are happening now are far below what's needed to actually protect people. How has the finding of the FAO influenced your decisions about investment? How has it influenced direction towards municipalities for the design of infrastructure? Can you enlarge on those?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: What I can say is that we are collecting information. We do agree with the report of the Auditor General. We are working with municipalities to also validate what needs they have and how government can support their needs.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Are you directing them to look at redesign of infrastructure to reflect the much higher levels of rainfall that we're going to encounter in the future?

You have to do more than nod. I understand it's because you're being agreeable, but you have to say it out loud.

Ms. Carlene Alexander: We have not gotten there yet. Once we receive all of the infrastructure plans completed,

we will be doing a full assessment of those infrastructure plans to determine if there are gaps, where additional investments might be needed, and we will be working very closely with municipalities to ensure that the gaps are addressed.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: When do you expect to address these gaps?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: I can't answer that question in terms of when it would be addressed. I can tell you that the infrastructure plans are due back in 2025, completed. We will then be hiring a third-party adviser to help us to assess those plans, and then we will have an analysis at that point.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Is someone in your ministry now looking at how much heavier rainfall and much higher windstorms will affect design requirements for infrastructure?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Perhaps I will turn it over to my ADM to elaborate on any information that I have provided.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: If they can answer that one question—are you actually looking at redesign?—that would be great.

Ms. Jill Vienneau: Hello, my name is Jill Vienneau. I'm the assistant deputy minister for—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Just going to get you to do the affirmation—

Ms. Jill Vienneau: Oh, yes, the affirmation.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Ms. Jill Vienneau: Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Thank you.

Ms. Jill Vienneau: My name is Jill Vienneau. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the infrastructure programs and projects division at the Ministry of Infrastructure. Our focus at the Ministry of Infrastructure is to support municipal asset management planning, so our colleagues at environment might need to actually add on design.

What I would say is that municipalities that are coming through with their asset management plans—the first tranche of asset management plans is focused on core infrastructure, and that includes stormwater. Those plans are coming in right now. It is a requirement that the municipalities look at not just the community levels of service and description and asset inventory but also talk about—the metrics we've asked them to include in their plans for stormwater management are the percentage of properties in the municipality resilient to a 100-year storm as well as the percentage of municipal stormwater management systems resilient to a five-year storm. So we're working with our municipal partners to support them and engage them in developing quality plans.

As the deputy mentioned, we will be reviewing the plans as they come in. They'll be bringing another tranche of plans forward for those other non-core assets in 2024 and then more robust plans in 2025 that look 10 years forward.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: What you've raised is an interesting point here: a five-year storm and a 100-year storm. Are these 100-year storms as we experienced over the last century or 100-year storms we expect to experience over the next century?

Ms. Jill Vienneau: The municipalities will communicate their interpretation of a 100-year storm based on the data that they have locally. We haven't specified the proactive retrospective view of those.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Seriously? So you're not asking them to project based on what we expect to have coming at us?

Ms. Jill Vienneau: Yes, that's a 100-year storm—sorry—looking forward. In the 2025 plan, where we're looking 10 years ahead, we'll be looking for the resilience focused forward, 10 years ahead.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So what you see now is what will be a 100-year storm a decade from now?

Ms. Jill Vienneau: Right. It's an interpretation of resilience based on engineering best practices and local conditions. Yes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Would it be possible for you to table with this committee those details so we can see what you're assuming a 100-year storm will look like 10 years from now?

Ms. Jill Vienneau: Municipalities are giving us their interpretation of the 100- and five-year—so that's one of the metrics. Each of the 444 municipalities is to include in their plans how they will plan for those two metrics.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate that. Thank you.

In recommendation 1 from the Auditor General, the AG recommended: "To resolve gaps in roles and responsibilities, we recommend that the" Ministries of Natural Resources, Environment, Municipal Affairs and Housing and Infrastructure "develop a provincial framework for urban flooding that clearly identifies and assigns roles and responsibilities for urban flood management."

The Auditor General noted that "the four ministries indicated" they "will continue to work within" their own mandates, "contrary to a recommendation made by the special adviser on flooding and a commitment made in Ontario's Flooding Strategy, none agreed to develop a provincial framework that clearly identifies and assigns roles and responsibilities for urban flood management."

I was a bit taken aback by that, given that you have recommendations from the special adviser on flooding, a commitment made in the Ontario flooding strategy and your four ministries seem to be the ones most centrally involved.

The first question is, why aren't you going forward on this recommendation from the special adviser on flooding?

Why don't I start with you, natural resources, at the far corner?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Absolutely. You can call me Monique; you don't have to worry about the long last name.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Excellent. Yes, because your name is a challenge.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'm Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, deputy minister for

the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. I'm happy to answer that question for you.

As you've heard from all of us, we all have various roles and responsibilities and we actively coordinate and collectively work together across those portfolios. One of the things that Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding noted as well: Everyone also has individual responsibilities.

But as you mentioned, the special adviser also recommended that the province create a working group of all pertinent ministries to define their respective roles as they pertain to pluvial flooding and, in response to that report, said, "Ontario will establish an Urban Flooding Work Group with representatives from the Ministries of Natural Resources and Forestry, Environment, Conservation and Parks, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Infrastructure and Transportation, as well as select municipalities," and that "the priorities of the work group will be to identify roles and responsibilities related to urban flooding, determine new or emerging urban flooding issues and develop a provincial framework for urban flooding policy."

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To fulfill that recommendation, MNRF will be leading the flood strategy commitment to establish a provincial urban flooding work group. So we will be moving forward on that and providing leadership across the ministries, and we'll be working towards developing a provincial framework for urban flooding, including clarifying those roles and responsibilities.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. I thank you for that. I appreciate that you've answered a question I was going to put, which is, "Who is taking the lead?" You're taking the lead.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Yes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: At what level, within your ministry, is the responsibility being assigned?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: We actively will work across, in that committee, at our policy divisional level. We have a deputy committee that's called PERL as well as an assistant deputy minister and, as well, a director level. So we'll work actively across all levels as we work through this.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Is there one person in your ministry who has been designated to lead this within the ministry?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I will say it's our policy division that will actively lead this, but we do have operational divisions that have a significant role, as you've heard in my introductory remarks, who will play a role. But our policy division will lead this.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: And who, within this policy division? What is the name of the person who will be leading this and what's their title?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: We have an assistant deputy minister, Craig Brown, who will be our lead on this one.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. And when is this committee due to be convened? When can we expect to see reports coming out of it?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I don't have a time frame for you at this point in time.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So—

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: We can certainly get back to you in terms of a time frame at some point, but I don't have one right now.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Will it be happening this year?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'm happy to get back to you with a bit more of a time frame, but I don't have a time frame right now that I can articulate today.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I guess I'm a bit taken aback. It's April; we do have a few months left in the year. It's an important matter. Do you expect—you're telling me you can't tell me whether or not you're going to convene this this year?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I can tell you that we are actively going to be leading this. I will start this year. We will start this year, but I can't tell you the whole time frame and how it will develop over the time frame. But I'm happy to put together a time frame, and we can share that with the committee.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Three minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Damn, it goes by so quickly, so quickly.

The backwater valves: That's something that's really puzzling to me. So, municipal affairs, the AG asked for a review of the Ontario building code. I think, as you're aware, in Alberta, they just assume everybody is vulnerable. I think they're right; everybody is. That hasn't been the word that's been coming out of your ministry. The province's climate plan says, "Yup, this is something that needs to happen." Why is the climate plan not being factored in? Why are you not taking into account the commitments in the climate plan to promote this amongst municipalities across the province?

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Thank you for your question, MPP Tabuns.

So we are certainly speaking with municipalities about this. Backwater valves: I would say the opinion of the professionals in the ministry is that they are good to use to future-proof houses, but they are not necessary in every house. We have a publication, the Code and Guide for Plumbing, and it describes conditions in which the backwater valves are needed in areas identified as high-risk for sewer backup, where almost all new houses would have them installed. For example, if the connection to the sewer is below the level of the adjoining street, a backwater valve would be required, and an additional backwater valve may be required if there is a second suite with its own connection to the public sewer system.

So at this time we are speaking with building practitioners and we are considering how backwater valves might be included in future iterations. But at this time, that is our perspective.

Maybe just to add there, we certainly are cognizant of the recommendation. That is why we are consulting with building officials at this time. We want to make sure that the ministry's perspective is clear. However, at this time we are not—sorry; may I go back there for a second?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): One minute remaining.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Okay. Apologies.

Once we've completed this plan engagement, we will consider whether future changes are required. It's not ruled out, of course. We have committed to align the technical requirements with the technical requirements of the national construction codes—I spoke to that in my opening remarks—and we want to look at alignment between our backwater valve requirements and those in the national plumbing code.

During consultation, we've heard from the code users that the provisions in Ontario's code are more clear. But, again, we have heard this question that you have raised, and we've heard it through the environment plan, and we are talking with code users at this time.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I have to say, there are all kinds of circumstances that will change whether or not a house is in a vulnerable area. If a wetland near a home is built on, suddenly a house that was high and dry is going to be part of an area that is going to be subject to rainfall-induced flooding. So it's very hard for you to predict, given changes in weather that are coming at us and changes in land use, which houses are going to actually be safe and which aren't. I think if they're at the top of a hill, probably they're in pretty good shape. But I'm not sure that your response is one that's responsible. The \$250 to install in a new building is very cheap insurance to avoid a \$43,000 bill—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're at time.

We now proceed to the government side, beginning with MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm going to continue on MPP Tabuns's line of questioning about the backwater valve. Why are we waiting to comply with the federal building code?

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: MPP Skelly, if the committee would not mind, I'd like to introduce a colleague. My colleague Mansoor is the director of our buildings branch and Ontario's chief building official. He is very expert in matters pertinent to both the backwater valve but also the harmonization of Ontario's building code with the national construction code.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Good afternoon. Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: I do.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Thank you so much.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is, why are we waiting to comply with the federal building code changes?

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: For the record, my name is Mansoor Mahmood. I'm the director of the building and development branch at MMH.

Let me add on to what my deputy just said. The requirements of Ontario's building code are actually more advanced than the national construction codes. What the requirements are is that where there is a high-risk area or there is a wetland, then all houses in that area would require a back-flow

prevention to be installed. The requirements in the national code are actually providing manual gate-valve-type applications to be done, whereas in Ontario's building code, we have pneumatic or automatic manual flap-type control valves, which are actuated on when the storm or back flow happens. So our requirements are more advanced than the national.

In addition to answering the previous question, the requirements in the Ontario building code also provide protection from flooding, damp-proofing and water seepage into the building. So those types of requirements prevent any house or any structure to be overwhelmed by back-flow water coming into the basement.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Is that for new builds or existing builds?

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: These are for new builds, because the code is prospective in nature, but in case of a major renovation, then it would apply as well.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Is there any consideration to applying or forcing existing homes to also include a backwater valve, or is this not possible with the current infrastructure—

Mr. Mahmood Mansoor: Again, it depends. If there is a need for a renovation to happen because of certain structural failure or things like that, and if it was deemed that it is due to penetration of water into the foundation, then it would be considered as a major renovation, and a backwater valve would be applied.

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Ms. Donna Skelly: So the bottom line is, currently in the province of Ontario, we do have a requirement that all new builds must have a backwater valve.

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: Yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay, perfect. And it's automatic—

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: Where it is necessary or where the risk is—

Ms. Donna Skelly: How do you know where it's risky, though?

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: There is a figure that we use in the building code which defines, basically, the grading of land. Any structure or any building that is below a certain level of grading, then it means that over there, there is the potential for sewer backup to happen and back flow to happen. But let's say if a house is sitting at the top of a mountain or a hill, there is absolutely no reason why a sewer backup would happen over there.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I don't know if you'd be the right person to ask, or whether it's the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs or Infrastructure, but can you build on a watershed? Where can you not build in terms of actually putting a physical structure when it comes to flooding risk?

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: My colleagues from the Ministry of the Environment will also talk about that, but from the building code perspective, flood plains are the areas where you normally require no building to go through. But let's say, if there is a flood plain where development has to happen, then the building code allows for those flood-proofing mechanisms to be put in place.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. But the chances of getting a building permit to put a home in an area where there's a flood plain or a watershed would be very difficult, or is it—

Mr. Mansoor Mahmood: The building permit is the second piece that comes in an approvals process. The first thing would be zoning and approvals, so from a planning perspective, if that development goes through zoning and it's deemed to be constructible, then yes, the building permit would be [*inaudible*].

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. My next question—thank you for that, by the way. I wanted to talk about conservation authorities. I'm not sure who mentioned this, but there was a reference to making municipalities more accountable when it comes to flood plains and urban flood risk and giving conservation authorities more authority. I can't remember: Was it Ministry of the Environment or Ministry of Natural Resources?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: I think CAs are under MNRF.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. So what exactly is the authority of the conservation authorities? What jurisdiction do they cover, and what role should they or are you recommending that they play in this risk aversion and assessment?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you for the question. It's Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, deputy minister, Ministry of Natural Resources. Conservation authorities review and comment on development applications and land use planning policy within the scope of their mandate, so anything that's natural-hazard-related. They do do some drinking water source protection, as well, but anything natural-hazard-related is their role in terms of review and comment. They provide that input to municipalities when it comes to development proposals and applications.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Is that the original core mandate of conservation authorities?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Donna Skelly: So this is important for them to have jurisdiction over this and—I mean, especially in light of climate change—to focus on their core mandate.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: This is the mandate of conservation authorities: to focus on natural hazards and provide that advice.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. And, again, I apologize—I'm not sure if it's municipal affairs or infrastructure, but I wanted to talk about obligations of municipalities to address outdated stormwater, sewer, waste water systems and, moving forward, what your ministry is doing to ensure that enough funds are being allocated to address what we perceive will be even more problems in the future due to climate change.

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Thank you very much for the question. Carlene Alexander, Ministry of Infrastructure. I'll talk a little bit more about our asset management planning process that we are leading with municipalities. The Ministry of Infrastructure oversees the asset management planning process, as per the regulation. So what these asset management plans do is they really do allow municipalities to look at how they're using their capital investment dollars in

order to stretch those capital dollars as much as possible to make sure that they are making well-informed, evidence-based, risk-based investments in their municipal infrastructure, and that includes stormwater.

Right now, as my colleague Jill Vienneau mentioned, we are receiving asset management plans which outline how municipalities are going to be investing in their stormwater infrastructure to reduce the risks and any adverse impacts that would occur if there were a major storm in the future. So we are working very closely with municipalities, providing them with the tools necessary to develop these asset management plans. We are analyzing the plans. As mentioned, we will also receive some help from a third-party adviser to do an even deeper dive analysis on the plans. We have also built communities of practice which will allow municipalities to come together and talk about best practices in terms of how they are going to support their stormwater infrastructure.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Once you have analyzed the plans, if you determine that a municipality is not investing enough resources, enough money in updating their stormwater systems, what then?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: We will be working with municipalities to help them to manage their own investments in their core infrastructure, but we do also have some programs in the province in which we can use the information from the asset management plans to determine how to best allocate some of the provincial infrastructure dollars, such as our OCIF program which we have used for stormwater infrastructure investments in the past. So by having this information from their asset management plans, we will better be able to make evidence-based and risk-based decisions around how we allocate provincial dollars as well.

Ms. Donna Skelly: It really then just means that there could be withholding of certain funds if they don't apply them to their existing or future infrastructure needs. Is that what you're suggesting?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Thank you for that question. If they do not produce asset management plans that are to our satisfaction, if they don't comply with the regulation, we can withhold any provincial infrastructure dollars that would be due to the municipalities. If we find that there are issues in terms of how they are allocating their own dollars, how they're managing their infrastructure as well, we could also withhold funding. So we will be able to partner very closely with municipalities to ensure that the investments are going to the right places.

Ms. Donna Skelly: We hear a lot about infrastructure, and we all believe that it's important to build, especially around transit routes. But we saw recently—I know it's since I was elected—in Toronto, for example, where they had a lot of the basements backing up in the big buildings and people were caught in elevators etc. Is anyone able to speak to the impact on existing older sewer/waste-water infrastructure when you have a number of high-rise buildings going up in a small space? Does that have a profound possible problematic impact on the existing infrastructure in certain municipalities? Can it?

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: I'm Kate Manson-Smith, the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, so I can begin that question. I'll just highlight to my colleague Sean that I'll probably look for his support with this question.

Certainly, if you are a municipality that is undertaking intensification on old infrastructure, as you are making land use planning decisions, you need to be taking into account the infrastructure that you have at this time, the infrastructure that will be required to support that intensification as you've described, and then as a part of your consideration, you would need to ensure that you had a plan for the infrastructure and a capital plan for the development of that infrastructure to support intensification.

Ms. Donna Skelly: In other words, building up does also cost in terms of having to examine and update existing infrastructure to accommodate the increased number of people living in a specific amount of space. So it's not all about expenses. I hear the argument all the time: Don't build out because it's costing too much money for infrastructure. But when you build up, there's still a lot of pressure in terms of the existing infrastructure.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: So I think, MPP Skelly, you're correct. If you're building infill for example in an older neighbourhood, you are considering different matters than if you are undertaking greenfield development in a new community. In an older community, you might be looking at aging infrastructure that could be decades old. It could have been put in place to support two-to-four-storey buildings.

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Ms. Donna Skelly: Wooden pipes, as we have in Hamilton.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Exactly. So I would say there are different considerations depending on what type of development you're taking, and as a municipality you would be thinking about that as you were considering a planning application and how that fit into your infrastructure plan and your capital funding plan.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Chair, how much time do we have?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You have six minutes, 50 seconds.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm going to share my time with MPP McCarthy.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): MPP McCarthy.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Through you, Mr. Chair, to the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry: Just over two years ago, right at the beginning of the world-wide pandemic and restrictions associated with it, Ontario released Protecting People and Property: Ontario's Flooding Strategy. That was in March 2020. The strategy, of course, contained many actions for provincial governments, municipalities and conservation authorities to undertake. Can the deputy tell us about the progress made thus far and whether this progress was affected at all by the impacts of March 2020 and onward? Now we're in an endemic of course, but considering that, can you tell us about progress to date and progress still hoped for in implementing these

actions to strengthen our approach to flooding in the province of Ontario?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you for the question. I'd be pleased to provide you an update on what we've been doing in response to the flooding strategy that was developed.

As you mentioned, in 2019, we experienced devastating flooding and so we launched a series of consultations and appointed Doug McNeil as Ontario's Special Adviser on Flooding, and then the special adviser's report contained many far-reaching recommendations for improving flood management in Ontario, including education and outreach initiatives, amendments to regulations and policy.

We released, as you mentioned, Protecting People and Property: Ontario's Flooding Strategy in March 2020. In total, it had over 90 actions for provincial governments, municipalities and conservation authorities. It was designed to help reduce the impacts of flooding in Ontario by introducing a series of new and enhanced actions that would reduce flood risks and help make our province better prepared for flooding events and better equipped to respond to them and more capable of recovering from them quickly. So we've been working collectively. All the ministries here at the table had recommendations within that strategy, and we've all been collectively working towards that together.

I'm happy to have Craig Brown, who's our ADM of policy, share some further information on how we've been implementing that strategy and what's been happening since that time.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Chair, through you, I believe Mr. Brown is participating remotely.

Failure of sound system.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): It seems to be on our end, so just bear with us for a little bit. Thank you.

Mr. Brown, could you try again?

Mr. Craig Brown: Can people hear me now?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Perfect. Thank you so much. I'm just going to quickly do the affirmation, and then you can go ahead.

Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Mr. Craig Brown: Yes, I do.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Thank you so much. Please go ahead.

Mr. Craig Brown: Good afternoon. I'm Craig Brown, the assistant deputy minister of policy at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. I'm happy to talk about how the government continues to prioritize its commitment to increasing public awareness and education of flooding and helping Ontarians understand the risk posed by flooding and the steps they can take to mitigate that risk.

Since March 2020, we've made progress toward the priorities and actions the deputy referenced in Ontario's Flooding Strategy. I'm pleased to report that implementation is under way for the eight action areas that are described

in the strategy. These action areas are: (1) enhancing flood-ing maps; (2) increasing public awareness and education; (3) clarifying roles and responsibilities; (4) promoting sound land use planning decisions; (5) enhancing flood forecasting and early warning; (6) enhancing emergency response; (7) reviewing disaster recovery assistance; and (8) securing funding for flood risk reduction. Within the strategy, the actions and the activities do vary in the amount of time they will take to complete. Some can be done within a year. Some will take more time, especially the ones that are more complex. Some of the activities that are outlined in the strategy may require new or enhanced legislation, regulations, policies, programs and guidelines. And these new authorities or financial commitments would be subject to significant analysis and government approval processes before these proposed activities could be implemented.

I can also provide some highlights of key activities that we have completed or that are under way in support of the flooding strategy.

The ministry has established a multi-agency Flood Mapping Technical Team to support the ministry in updating provincial guidance to better identify flood hazard areas. Between fall 2022 and March 2024, the province is leveraging approximately \$7.3 million in funding for flood mapping under the federal Flood Hazard Identification and Mapping Program.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): One minute remaining.

Mr. Craig Brown: As part of that program, there are 35 local organizations receiving funding in support of 54 locally identified, high-priority flood hazard identification and mapping projects. Approximately \$6.1 million is being given to municipalities and conservation authorities to support local flood mapping activities, and an additional \$1.2 million will be spent on acquiring elevation data in high-risk areas.

The ministry has continued its partnership with the federal government to provide high-quality water level and flow information for watercourses across the province, and that helps us determine the potential for flooding and aids in the provision of early-warning messages for flooding.

An investment of more than \$4.8 million a year in the Canada-Ontario hydrometric network also better enables early flood warnings and helps municipalities prepare for flood events.

We also work with a series of partners—the International Joint Commission; the Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board, which includes Ontario, Canada and the province of Quebec; as well as Conservation Ontario—to discuss better ways of communicating the risks—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're at time. Thank you very much.

1500

We'll now move on to our independent member. You have three minutes, MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Great. Thank you. We're going to be speedy, because I only have three minutes.

First is financial incentives for flood-proofing homes for homeowners. I think that is the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Are you providing subsidies? Is that your division?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: We're not providing subsidies directly—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Who's in charge of providing financial incentives? I thought that was the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: I can give you some sense of what we're doing—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sure. It has to be super quick, because I only have three minutes, so you've got a minute—less.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: I think we're doing more things at a broader community-resiliency level, as opposed to providing individual homeowners with—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So, then, no, you're not doing any incentive subsidies.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Not direct incentives to individuals, but we're building broader resilience across communities with a number of programs, including \$15 million for 18 municipalities in the Lake Ontario basin, \$30 million to extend and expand the waste water management program—we've already spent \$30 million on that. There's also a lot of work being done on the Canada-Ontario agreement that would support homeowners.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Thanks. So you're expecting municipalities, maybe, to provide those incentives instead of your department?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: We're providing money so that municipalities can use our money to support resiliency.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Perfect. Okay. And why just 18 municipalities?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: It was on the Lake Ontario basin. So those are the identified municipalities. It was focused on Lake Ontario.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But we know that anywhere it rains, it can flood nowadays, right? So can we expand that?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: That was that particular program, the COA program. Other programs are broader, as well.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Thank you.

Public education: I've heard this a fair bit, awareness and education, which is very timely in light of my private member's bill last week—just trying to get a flyer sent out, and we couldn't even do that. I'm just wondering what kind of education and awareness—I believe that is possibly the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'm pleased to speak to that, and I'll try to be quick as well. Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

We do have a website. You can go to ontario.ca/floods, and that is where we provide a lot of information. We not only provide helpful information around actively what's happening around flood situations, but how people can do emergency preparedness, emergency notifications—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But specifically what for your basement, specifically what emergency preparedness, in 20 seconds?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Okay. We outline actions homeowners can take before, during and after a flood emergency to help protect themselves—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Specifically what? Sorry; I only have three minutes. Specifically what? Like, sump pumps? Disconnect your downspout?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Well, we have an interactive map and the status of flood works. But you're asking for, in particular, as an individual, what information—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, homeowners—for flood-proofing.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'd have to call upon someone to actually read the details that are available in there—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're at time.

We'll return to the official opposition. MPP Shaw, you have 20 minutes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for being here, all of you.

I want to just give some context of how, in Hamilton, we understand the importance of stormwater and waste water state-of-good-repair. As you will probably all know, 24 billion litres of raw sewage leaked into Cootes Paradise over a period of time. This happened—in November, it was discovered—in July 2019 and August 2019.

I actually filed a freedom-of-information request in December 2019 and didn't get any information back until 2021, two years later. Just as a comment, it makes it very difficult for people to understand what's happening in their community. I don't believe that an FOI return of two years is what we should expect. So that's just a comment that I have to make about trying to understand what happened in our community. It was quite clearly a failure of the aging system, but it certainly was a failure of our oversight and regulatory bodies and our political system as well. We still have not seen the conclusion of that.

So yes, we understand the importance of municipal stormwater and keeping those in good repair.

We heard today that we're going to look at municipalities asset-management plans to see whether they're adequate. I did hear Ms. Alexander say that we're going to see whether municipalities can stretch their dollars to take care of some of this infrastructure. The FAO, in 2021, said that municipalities have an estimated \$3.8 billion of needed repairs, just to bring it up to a state of good repair. So that's a lot of money. That's a lot of stretching of municipal taxpayer dollars.

I also would say that, in the municipality of Hamilton, the last I saw was about a \$3.5-billion infrastructure deficit; it's probably a lot more than that. And in order to address some of these things, we're facing a 5.6% residential taxpayer increase.

So I would just say, given that condition, as MPP McMahon has been asking, we would expect there to be

more protections for homeowners and for municipal taxpayers.

Under the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, there was a commitment related to urban flooding: that the ministry would consult on tax options to support homeowners. The status at the time of the Auditor General's audit was, "The Ministry of Finance regularly considers tax policy options within the context of the government's priorities" but "the Ministry of Finance has not consulted on tax policy options to support homeowners in adopting measures to protect their homes against extreme weather events."

Finally, I've heard about some of the plans that are being put in place and some of the programs to support municipalities. I can't see how in any way these programs will come close to the billions and billions of dollars that municipalities require.

I guess I would start this question with Ms. Alexander, if you want to talk about the supports to municipalities—and then, Mr. Imbrogno, if you want to talk about environment's FOI response time and what we can expect going forward. So my question is, how do you think municipalities are going to be able to manage these costs, other than downloading them onto municipal taxpayers who are already overburdened? And I just would say, do you think that the programs you identified today are adequate to come anywhere close to helping municipalities fix the aging stormwater and waste water systems—not only in Hamilton, but across the province?

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Thank you very much for the question, MPP Shaw.

I will start off by saying that the government of Ontario does recognize that there are significant infrastructure needs, and the government of Ontario has called on the federal government for new funding of \$10 billion a year, per year, for 10 years. This commitment would help municipalities and communities to meet the demand for infrastructure renewal and respond to climate change and support economic growth. So there is a recognition that a need is there.

I would also say that we are trying to utilize the existing programs that we have to meet the most urgent and the most pressing needs. That's the purpose of the asset management plans, both for the existing provincial programs as well as for any municipal dollars that the municipalities have in terms of their investments—by looking at evidence-based, the highest-risk, and trying to allocate funding to those highest-risk. So the risk management plans will look at what the risks are that exist, what the current and proposed service levels are of the different infrastructure assets, the life-cycle management etc., and try to ensure that they're allocated to the most highest needs.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I guess it's not a question, but I'm just hoping that you won't be true to your word—to say you'll withhold any infrastructure dollars if they're not compliant—because I think municipalities are struggling for every infrastructure dollar that they can get.

If I can just go back to Serge Imbrogno regarding the environment piece, the other thing I would like to know, in addition to my original question: Are you sharing best

practices? Municipalities have got to find revenue tools somewhere. Quite clearly, the provincial government is not supporting municipalities to the degree that they need. We can't wait for the federal government to come up with \$10 billion. That would be great, but that's not what homeowners can wait for. We see, at the end of the day, that municipalities are struggling. So do you have any information on best practices around revenue tools that municipalities can use to help them support their costs to make sure that the infrastructure is in good working condition? If you would like to share some suggestions for municipalities as to what they can do, outside of more municipal homeowner residential tax-base charges.

1510

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Thank you for the question. We are the regulatory ministry; we're not necessarily the funding ministry. But I wouldn't mind addressing your first point about Hamilton.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Sure.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: So, obviously, 24 billion litres of raw sewage spilt into Cootes Paradise and Chedoke—Hamilton has been charged, as you know. I think the next court date is likely in May. We have issued another order for cleanup in October. So, on that particular issue, it's very, very unfortunate. But Minister Piccini is seized with that and trying to get Hamilton to do the cleanup, as ordered.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: If I could just add to that before you go to the second part of the question, it was clear in the FOI report that I got—the parts that weren't completely redacted—that the Hamilton Conservation Authority was issuing phosphorus reports over a long period of time that were being received by the Ministry of the Environment. So, I guess, if you want to talk about this, my question would be: As the ultimate oversight body, what do you think that the Ministry of the Environment could have done better to make sure that the people of Hamilton knew about this in a timely fashion?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Yes. Now, that was a particularly difficult issue where they left a gate open undetected—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, I understand. I saw it; I toured it, so I know it's not a hospitable environment, I'll just say. But it's my understanding, and from the FOI reports, that the ministry was receiving elevated phosphorus reports over a long period of time, so somebody should have caught this. This should have been a red flag for the ministry as the ultimate regulatory body when it comes to our safe drinking water.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: You know, the complication with cities like Hamilton and Toronto that have older infrastructure, where you have the combined sewer infrastructure—you have large rain events, you have the two mixing and you have issues with discharge.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Big bucks to fix it.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Especially in these older cities.

But, having said that, one of the things we have moved to is a consolidated linear infrastructure approach for approving stormwater systems. Previously, we would give municipalities a pipe-by-pipe approval, which, you can imagine, is not very efficient. We moved to a consolidated

linear infrastructure ECA approach where they come in with their whole system and we look at it, and we approve it. We have a five-year renewal where we look at the conditions that we put in. We require them to make sure they have oversight of that system. We've moved to that. I can have one of my colleagues come up and give you more detail on that, because I think it's an important—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Maybe offline? That would be great. I wouldn't mind.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: Offline?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, if there's more information that they're prepared to share about—

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: [*Inaudible*] excited about it because it does give a new approach.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, excited is good.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: It's more efficient for municipalities and better oversight of the systems from the municipal ministry perspective.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. Good. Yes, I mean, we need to learn from this tragedy, absolutely. That shouldn't happen again.

Can I just—because I promised that I would share my time with my colleague, MPP Tabuns, and I try to keep my promises; right, Peter?

My question: I did ask you about revenue tools for municipalities, and you can share that with me. But I just want to say, in the context of, for example, Bill 23, where we have expanded building on potential wetlands—which we're not even quite clear whether they are wetlands because of the state they're in flood plain mapping. I want to talk about protections for homeowners as well. How can homeowners be assured that, when we expand the urban boundaries—which was against the municipality of Hamilton's interests—when we build on the greenbelt, that they won't be left holding the bag? Because we know they're going to be left holding the bag for the increase to the municipal taxes to support the infrastructure. We know that they're left holding the bag, because the insurance losses we're talking about are in the billions and billions. And that's just insured losses; we're not talking about people who don't have insurance or aren't covered.

So, how can we ensure, going forward, that homeowners are protected when we are expanding to build in areas where, quite clearly, we're not sure what's going on? Because we have the four ministries that are clearly not coordinated; we have a rapidly changing climate. We're moving so quickly, and homeowners need to be protected. In terms of just protecting their home and their assets, protecting their finances when it comes to increased tax dollars, how can we ensure that we're doing the right thing by homeowners and taxpayers?

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: I'm going to let my colleague answer your question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Sure. Thank you.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Kate Manson-Smith with municipal affairs and housing.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Hi.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: So, a number of different aspects of your question—but I will do my very best there, and then feel free to follow up, of course.

I think I would probably start by saying that just because this land is going to be developed doesn't mean that it's going to be subject urban flooding. When we're talking about lands being opened up for development, there are many layers of systems that I would say should give comfort to someone who would be purchasing one of those homes.

Our system is supported by provincial policy that requires that development to be directed away from hazard lands—those are valleys and those are flood plains—directed away from natural heritage features in areas, and that would include wetlands—I think you mentioned that—and that green infrastructure be encouraged. So first of all, we're directing development away from those areas. And then, second of all, through the planning process, stormwater management is another important part of the planning process that's addressed at the plan-of-subdivision stage, so this would be further down. The first piece I was speaking to would sort of be about where development was directed; and then, through the plan-of-subdivision phase, stormwater management would be addressed; and then, as my colleague Mansoor spoke to earlier, in areas where it's needed, backwater valves would be required. So from directing development away from at-risk areas to ensuring that stormwater management is fully considered through the planning process, through the subdivision process, and then through the use of those backwater valves we talked about earlier where required, there are multiple layers of protection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): MPP Tabuns, you have seven minutes and 12 seconds.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm going to go to recommendation 12 from the Auditor General. She writes, "To protect the flood-control benefits afforded by wetlands, to meet relevant goals in Ontario's Flooding Strategy," she made a number of recommendations to the Ministry of Natural Resources about a "standard for approving submitted wetland evaluations," to "develop and implement interim protections for unevaluated wetlands," etc.

The natural resources ministry's response was, "Wetlands are managed through a diverse array of policies.... Any changes to wetland policies and programs would be considered within the scope of broader government direction."

The Auditor General noted, "The natural resources ministry has not committed to any of the recommended measures to improve the efficiency of wetland evaluations or the protections for unevaluated wetlands or wetlands with high flood-reduction benefits. The ministry also did not agree to developing a strategic plan to protect wetlands, despite numerous commitments made in the 2020 flooding strategy intended to help prevent new wetland loss in Ontario."

Ms. von den Baumen-Clark—I hope I'm close—how can people be protected from flooding if wetlands are not going to be protected, if they effectively are very substantial buffers on the landscape? Your ministry won't commit to even your flooding strategy. So why won't you commit to fulfilling your flooding strategy and why won't you

respond positively to the recommendations of the Auditor General?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you for the question. The recent changes still recognize the important role wetlands play for climate change resiliency and flooding. The provincial policy statement prohibits development in provincially significant wetlands, and our OWES, which is the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System, is used to determine which wetlands are provincially significant. Flood attenuation is one of the many criteria assessed and scored under OWES, and recent changes made to our manuals didn't substantially change that content of the hydrological component of the OWES, and that's the section where the flood attenuation is considered.

Our OWES manual still considers a wetland function and flood attenuation by assessing three factors: the size of the wetland, the size of the wetland basin and the size of other detention areas in the basin. That's how we still use the consideration of the function of wetlands for flood protection in our evaluations. All existing evaluated wetlands retain their status, significant or not, until there's a need to re-evaluate them.

Wetlands are still required to be evaluated. This did not change, and the wetlands will be evaluated according to the OWES manual.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: But the Auditor General pointed out that it takes an extraordinarily long time to actually get an evaluation done, that there is no protection in place for those that are not yet evaluated. We're in a situation where construction can go ahead, eliminating flood protection for a variety of homes in a region, and the OWES system never actually is applied.

The Auditor General made recommendations to you, to your ministry, for measures to improve the efficiency of wetland evaluations, and you did not accept those. Why?

1520

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'm happy to have my colleague Jennifer Keyes come to speak to some of the changes and how we are conducting OWES evaluations.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Hi, Ms. Keyes. I'm just going to quickly read the affirmation: Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: I do.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Thank you so much.

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: Thank you for the question. We did update the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System just recently, in December, and we recognize the efficiency that the Auditor General is looking for, so we actually streamlined the approval process to expedite wetland evaluation so MNRF staff are no longer evaluating evaluators' work, which we thought was duplicative. Once a trained wetland evaluator evaluates a wetland, they attest that their evaluation is complete and then that can continue on through the municipal planning process.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So you're saying that you actually have met the conditions that were recommended by the Auditor General, that in fact you've implemented what the Auditor General recommended. Is that what you're telling me?

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: We've implemented modernization to the wetland evaluations—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Sorry. Did you implement what the Auditor General recommended?

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: I can't specify that. But I also wanted to highlight that conservation authorities play an important role in wetland management. The provincial policy statement recognizes provincially significant wetlands, but the conservation authorities, where they regulate hazardous areas, including wetlands, actually regulate all wetlands. So in order to protect people and property from flooding, conservation authorities will evaluate a development against a wetland to make sure that there's no impact to that hazard.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: As you're aware, laws have changed in Ontario, so conservation authorities are now at times forced to issue permits or approvals for buildings in areas where they don't think they should go forward, so I don't consider conservation authorities to be that brake anymore that protects us.

It's unfortunate, Chair; we only have two 20-minute sessions. I've gone through a little more than half my questions. I'm wondering if there's a potential for another 20-minute round.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Is there a committee agreement for an additional round of questions?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I see. Things are made clearer.

I want to thank everyone who presented today. I appreciate your professionalism and the work that you do.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Chair, we still have 23 minutes of questions. [*Inaudible*] some of them may be answered in what is asked by the members who are about to ask questions now.

Interjections.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Yes, 23 minutes. We're not finished yet, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: How much time? Does he have the floor? We have the floor, right?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You've got a minute and 15.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: If I can follow up with what my colleague was saying and connect the two, which is my question about Bill 23 allowing development in areas that we clearly think shouldn't be developed—and we also sense that there's not clear understanding of where flood plains are, where wetlands are. We're getting contradictory information here, but we're rushing ahead, the government is rushing ahead to expand on the greenbelt, to expand in areas that may end up costing homeowners a lot of money and a lot of heartache.

So really, what assurances can you give us, given climate change, given the fact that we're building now in areas that were never intended to be built on, that homeowners will not be left holding the bag?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Again, I'm happy to speak to what we're doing around provincial land use planning, which I think is the first step in terms of making sure that people are aware of where we should be developing and where we should not.

Maybe we can start there, Kate, and then we can talk about more details.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Sure. So perhaps just what I would say is—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're at time.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you. Through you, Chair, I wanted to thank everyone—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Government side, 20 minutes.

Ms. Laura Smith: Twenty minutes?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You have 20 minutes. To the government side: MPP Smith, I recognize you.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you. Sorry.

I want to thank all of the contributors. I'm going to preface this by saying that I apologize in advance if I've addressed the incorrect ministry with the question. Please feel free to pass that over to that individual, because it's a little bit of inside baseball with everything that's happening.

I believe that my first question will be with the Ministry of Infrastructure with Ms. Manson-Smith. I want to concentrate on smaller municipalities. We talked about some of the disaster recovery programs and protections that provide funding to municipalities, but we've heard from many of Ontario's smaller and rural municipalities who say they just simply don't have the amount of resources to keep up with their needs—staffing or asset management. We talked a lot about asset management and the funding plans to execute these critical projects for the communities. So how are we helping those smaller or rural municipalities deal with some of the issues that we have been talking about?

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: I'm Kate Manson-Smith from municipal affairs and housing. Perhaps I will start and turn things to my colleague Carlene from the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Your question is very well-taken. Smaller municipalities do not have the same capacity, they do not have the same economies of scale that larger municipalities have, and certain ways of planning or funding infrastructure might just not be practicable if you're a small community of a couple of hundred people. So at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, we have municipal services offices in each of the five regions of Ontario, and our teams build close relationships with small municipalities to make sure we understand their needs and can support those needs as best possible. We look to help them to work together to do things, for example, to form service-delivery agreements and partnerships so that they can get better bang for their buck locally.

We also do municipal exchanges. Through our municipal services offices, we host exchanges on topics of interest and importance to municipalities, including in this space and in terms of flood prevention—I have some notes on that and I'll just find them, if you'll forgive me—because

we do know those smaller municipalities need to learn from the experience of others or to be able to leverage some of that capacity that exists in their larger neighbours and, indeed, provincially.

We had two webinars on urban flooding as a part of our municipal exchange series. That's really about peer-to-peer learning and sharing of best practices. We had 250 municipal officials participate in those sessions from across Ontario. One focused on basement-flooding prevention and featured speakers from a couple of different municipalities on the subject of backwater valves and how they use those working with homeowners in the areas where they're necessary. The other was on the subject of how they assess risks and return on investment to identify and manage flood risks related to climate change.

When it comes to infrastructure programs for small municipalities, I'll turn things to my colleague, Carlene.

Ms. Carlene Alexander: Thank you very much, Kate, and thank you very much for the question, MPP Smith. I'm going to first start out by talking about our Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, so our OCIF program. It has a particular focus on small, rural and northern communities because we know that they are essential for growth in this province. Our program is designed to help those particular communities. We do know that there are significant needs, and our OCIF programming has doubled in size over the last couple of years. We are investing an additional \$1 billion over the next five years. It started in 2022, so the funding has gone from \$200 million per year to \$400 million per year to help those smaller municipalities.

The other thing that I'd like to talk about when it comes to smaller municipalities actually goes to a point that MPP Shaw made. When you talked about how you hope that we are not withholding funds, I just wanted to clarify that particular point while I have the floor and just talk about how that is actually a last resort, and we are providing a lot of support to small municipalities in terms of preparing their asset management plans.

1530

I'm just going to talk a bit in more detail about some of the things that we're doing. We have developed a tool kit in partnership with the Municipal Finance Officers' Association, or MFOA, to help municipalities, in particular small municipalities, to develop those strategic asset management policies. This tool kit has been made available to all municipalities in Ontario.

In addition, we have had very particular, close relationships with small municipalities in looking at their asset management plan assessments and have been making actionable recommendations to those municipalities, in particular municipalities with populations of less than 25,000. This has been done by expert consultants, in partnership with MFOA again.

To date, there have been 30 hours of support as well as folks travelling to meet with those municipalities in person to work through their plans. Priority municipalities with limited resources and capacity received an additional 10 hours of consultant support to help them to build and

implement their actionable recommendations. There are also community-of-practice initiatives in partnership with Asset Management Ontario, including group seminars, workshops, online forums, conferences, peer reviews and readiness assessments, and there will be continued investments and partnerships to assist municipalities in developing those asset management plans to meet the requirements under the regulation. There is coaching and assistance, there are the group workshops etc., so there is a lot of partnership with those small municipalities, to help them.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you for unpacking the tool kit.

Circling back to funding: Given the fact that not all municipalities are eligible, are there any other programs that are available for these smaller—as somebody who has lived through a flood, I am worried about the future of new developments, old developments that are in smaller communities. Is there something else that's available for future infrastructure needs?

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: At this point, our Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program—all of that funding has been fully allocated. We are looking at trying to work with the federal government on, potentially, another round of the funding; at this point, we have not received a commitment. We do recognize that needs exist.

Ms. Laura Smith: We're seeing more and more examples of extreme weather. I think this is an impact to our municipalities, and risks associated with urban flooding are a reality. What is your ministry—or if we want to move over to another—doing to ensure that municipal infrastructures are resilient, to withstand the change in climate that we're experiencing?

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Just to play back the question, to make sure I have it correctly: What is the government doing to support municipal infrastructure needs as weather changes and storms become more frequent? Do I have that question right?

Ms. Laura Smith: Yes.

Ms. Kate Manson-Smith: Certainly we're collaborating across ministries to make sure we're looking at the full spectrum of municipal needs. I think Carlene has spoken about infrastructure programs and the need for the federal government to come to the table to supplement the funding that's available provincially. At municipal affairs and housing, we work closely with municipalities; I talked about that in response to your colleague's question.

I would also just add, before turning to my colleagues, that we work to help municipalities to plan their communities to avoid flood risks. I think I could speak, perhaps just for a moment, to prevention. Of course, the best thing to do, as I'm sure the auditor and committee would agree, is to prevent homes from being damaged by floods in the first place. The land use planning considerations or the land use planning system do play a part in that regard, so I can just speak to that for a couple of minutes if that's helpful.

Adapting to a changing climate is set out as a matter of interest in the Planning Act, and what that means is that municipalities need to ensure that their official plan policies

are responsive to a changing climate, things like when they're passing zoning bylaws or considering use of land that they are considering things like hazard lands, flood-prone areas and protecting ecological functions.

I would just bring that together with your question about infrastructure, that the support that we can provide to municipalities through legislation, through policy, through our work with our municipal offices can help ensure that their infrastructure needs are minimized through the use of effective land use planning.

From there, I'll see if any colleagues have anything they would like to add.

Mr. Serge Imbrogno: I'd say, as a regulatory ministry, we're doing more to provide information. I've talked a bit about the consolidated linear infrastructure piece that we've put in through—I can give you more detail on that.

But I think the other thing that's of interest—I think I mentioned it my opening remarks—is we have a draft of the low-impact development guidance manual that was posted on the Environmental Registry for comment. We received a number of comments from organizations and individuals, including municipalities, conservation authorities, developers, non-governmental organizations and the public, and we're currently reviewing that. But this guidance manual aims to help municipalities, developers, property owners and others in protecting the environment, managing rain where it falls, helping reduce flood risk and increasing resiliency to climate change.

Low-impact development is also known as green infrastructure. It's intended to mitigate environmental impacts, but it also reduces the volume of runoff that needs to be further managed. It's designed to handle rainwater for more common rainfall events and can reduce the flooding risk for urban areas. So I think that's important information that we're providing to municipalities.

I've already talked about that consolidated linear infrastructure approach. Rather than a pipe-by-pipe approach, we're doing a wider approval of that infrastructure that gives us more ability to impose conditions on the municipalities, making sure that they review their stormwater infrastructure at least every five years and commit for a renewal. So I think that's part of what we're doing on the regulatory side to ensure that municipalities are doing more to deal with flooding.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I've got a little bit if you want me to continue.

Ms. Laura Smith: Have at it.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: One of the things I had referenced before—that to help protect people and property it's important to be able to identify flood hazard areas. Deputy Manson-Smith talked about having the policies in place to ensure there's no development in flood hazard areas, but it's also important to continue to update our flood-hazard mapping areas so that we're fully aware of areas that we maybe hadn't anticipated were susceptible and, with changing circumstances, may need to be identified. So that accurate and up-to-date flood mapping leads to better land use planning decisions and it helps direct development away from flood-prone areas and

just provides that certainty for developers and property owners.

I mentioned earlier that we're leveraging \$7.3 million of funding that's available right now through the federal Flood Hazard Identification and Mapping Program. We're coordinating that and working with municipalities, conservation authorities as well as Indigenous communities so that they can apply for up to 50% funding for eligible flood-mapping activities. We have 35 local organizations that either have or will be receiving funding in support of 54 high-priority flood-mapping projects, and approximately \$6.1 million is being given to municipalities and conservation authorities to support that local flood-mapping activity.

We're also spending about \$1.2 million on acquiring elevation data in high-risk areas as well to help continue to inform that identification of flood-hazard areas. So from our perspective, having that quality flood mapping helps communities be able to plan better and be more resilient to flooding.

Ms. Laura Smith: And, sorry, just to extend to that, how often do you take that information and curve it to what's going on in the world? Did you say five years? You monitor, collect and analyze data and you disseminate this in a timely way on a regular basis. How long is that?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: The flood-hazard mapping?

Ms. Laura Smith: Yes.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'll ask Jennifer to come up and provide a bit more detail.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you.

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Ms. Jennifer Keyes: My name is Jennifer Keyes and I'm the director of the resource planning and policy development branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. What the deputy was referring to is we fly elevation mapping—so we take digital imagery to provide conservation authorities and municipalities with data that allows them to update their flood-plain mapping, and then that mapping is eventually incorporated into official plans when they update their official plans. It's kind of a cycle of continuous improvement whenever data is available. Municipalities sometimes fly it; the federal government and MNRF will fly it or purchase it. So we use that data to inform our flood-plain mapping that municipalities do.

Ms. Laura Smith: So it's quite a breathing document because it changes, I would imagine.

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: Yes, it's data; it's base data that's available to practitioners.

Ms. Laura Smith: And it was launched last year, correct? Or no?

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: That was the influx of money that was received, yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. So the Flood Hazard Identification and Mapping Program was launched last year, correct?

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: That's correct. It's a federal program that we're partnering with, so it's a transfer payment from

the federal government to MNRF out to municipalities, conservation authorities and Indigenous communities.

Ms. Laura Smith: All right. Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: Thank you.

Ms. Laura Smith: I think I'm going to pass—how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You have three minutes, 30 seconds.

Ms. Laura Smith: Three minutes and 30 seconds?

Mr. Will Bouma: I'll take it.

Ms. Laura Smith: All right, I will pass my time to my colleague Mr. Bouma.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you everyone for all of your presentations. I don't think I'll get too terribly specific in one ministry or any question like that, but I really appreciate you all being here. So often we get stuck in our silos and it's exciting to see multiple ministries working on the same problem together at the same time.

I guess my question is, can someone tell a story about the benefits of that collaborative work that you're all doing together and what that has meant in flooding preparedness for the province of Ontario? Something that I can go home and tell my high school daughter about that would be like, "This is government working and working well across ministries."

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Okay, I'll offer some information. I have some colleagues on the line, as well. Certainly, in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, for us, ensuring that we have really up-to-date, available information on provincial flood forecasting and warnings is of paramount importance to protect people and property. Certainly, we're involved every year in some situation or another, so I'm happy to speak to that and, in fact, I'll hand it over to Jennifer Barton from our regional operations division, and then, as well, if you have time, we may have Tracey Mill speak to some of the situations we've had the opportunity to help communities with in these types of situations.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You have a minute and a half.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: I'm here, but do you need us to do the attestation first?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Hi, Ms. Barton; apologies for that. Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Ms. Jennifer Barton: I do.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): Please go ahead.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Jennifer Barton; I am the assistant deputy minister with the regional operations division at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. In terms of a story to tell, I think we have had lots of experiences around flooding in the recent past. Perhaps I can quickly talk about some of what happened in the northwest part of

the province, where they experienced some unprecedented flooding back in 2022. It was a difficult time for communities and businesses in northwestern Ontario, as the water levels and flooding were felt right across the region. The ministry heightened its work preparing to support the emergency efforts, including increasing surveillance of lakes, river systems and critical infrastructure, and collecting and sharing information with other emergency-response partners, municipalities, Indigenous communities and the public.

Our efforts focused on raising awareness of the situation emerging across the region, providing weather and flooding information to support decision-making, working with municipalities and Indigenous communities, and moving resources like sandbags to higher-risk areas, as well as monitoring and securing aircrafts to be able to monitor and evacuate any residents if it was necessary. Lots of work happened right across the ministry and across all our different provincial colleagues.

There were some examples that we can talk about. A really good example that I can raise is that the ministry supported the work of an unorganized township, a township known as Rugby, where residents were really struggling because they lost access to one of their major highways into the community. The ministry fully opened and improved a forestry road, so a road that typically wouldn't have been used for public traffic, but the ministry was able to quickly work with our partners both at the municipal level and across the—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. We're at time.

We now move to the independent member.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay, here we go—three minutes. Is my mike going on? I'll just speak loudly. I have two questions, and they're about timelines. I think it is Deputy Minister Monique again—the hot seat; sorry—but if I'm wrong with that, then feel free to jump in, whomever.

This is back to flood mapping again and lidar data suitable for flood mapping. It's saying that you're going to collect it over the next four years to hopefully ramp up the numbers of Ontario municipalities that have been mapped. So where are we at with that? We're aiming for 95% of populated areas in 2026, but where are we at with that now?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you. Jennifer, are you able to provide an update on the lidar situation?

Ms. Jennifer Keyes: Lidar is a flyover technology that has to be when trees don't have their leaves on. You need to see the elevation. It is limited on weather, so it can't be cloudy, and the trees can't have leaves on them, in order to see the ground.

We do a schedule. We procure as much flyover data as we can get, or if the municipality flies it and wants to share it with us, we look forward to doing that. So we can't commit to a timeline, because Mother Nature doesn't allow us.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. That's interesting.

The next one is the internal natural resources disaster mitigation review. That is under a two-year review. I just wonder where we're at in that timeline.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: The natural disaster mitigation review: Yes, that one is one that we're working on that's looking at all emergencies collectively, so we're looking at fire and flood and looking at how to improve the work that we do relative to emergency management. You had asked about the timeline for that. It's under way already, and we'll be doing continuing work this year and next year, and probably finishing up all the work by next year.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: By 2024?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Yes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. That's good news. And then, since we have a minute or so left, can we go back to our public education and what the ministry is doing to get something into homeowners' hot little hands to teach them how to not have a basement flood?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Certainly. I can continue with that. There are not only some of the pieces around how you develop, but on our flooding website

that I mentioned to you already where we can go, ontario.ca/flood, there is lots of information in there in terms of your own property, both inside in terms of in your basements—things that you should do—as well as outside things, like extending your downspout, how to keep water away from your foundation, how to regularly maintain water drainage systems. So there are a number of things that provide information there for landowners—

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. We're at time.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: [*Inaudible*] going out to the homeowner?

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Sorry, member, but we're at time.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. I'll talk to you later.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): That concludes the time for questions this afternoon. I'd like to thank all of you for appearing before the committee today. Thank you again; you're dismissed.

We will now pause briefly as we go into closed session so that the committee can commence report-writing.

The committee recessed at 1551 and later continued in closed session.

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