



## **Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative 2008 Annual Meeting and Conference Overview**

*Cities of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence:  
Prosperity, Vitality, Sustainability*



Over 200 delegates met in Toronto, Ontario for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (Cities Initiative) 2008 Annual Meeting and Conference on July 16-18, 2008. Mayor David Miller, Founding Canadian Chair and a Director on the Cities Initiative Board, welcomed mayors, elected officials, representatives from the provincial, state and federal governments in Canada and the United States, and other stakeholders from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence region to join in this year's conference, "Cities of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence: Prosperity, Vitality, Sustainability." The Annual Meeting and Conference provided an excellent forum for cities and other stakeholders dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River to strengthen their partnerships with one another, learn about issues facing the region, and advance action to keep the region prospering in a sustainable manner.

The Annual Meeting and Conference began with a pre-conference Toronto Waterfront study tour on Wednesday, July 16th. The many innovative environmental projects the city has underway, particularly along the waterfront, are exemplary of Mayor Miller's commitment to protecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence and his dedication to the mission of the Cities Initiative. Local experts guided participants around the waterfront which boasts parks, beaches, shops, restaurants and galleries. Tour guides shared information about environmental projects along the waterfront including the transformation of land from industrial space to parks and public space, water quality improvements and brownfield remediation.



GLSLCI Mayors and Local Officials at the 2008 Annual Meeting

## **MEMBERS MEETING & CONFERENCE**

On Thursday, July 17th, after welcoming remarks from Mayor Miller, the Honorable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of the Province of Ontario greeted conference delegates via webcast. Premier McGuinty addressed the role of cities in a world facing the growing pressures of climate change. He emphasized how critical local leadership is in dealing with these challenges, further underscoring the Cities Initiative mission to promote environmental stewardship at a local level.

The Cities Initiative Members Meeting followed Premier McGuinty's comments. Members were eager to set the course of action for the upcoming year and passed 15 resolutions, including calls for involving cities in the renegotiation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, increased federal funding for aging water and wastewater infrastructure, and the acceleration of the cleanup of Areas of Concern.

Mayor Lynn Peterson from Thunder Bay, Ontario became the new Chair of the organization, Mayor George Heartwell from Grand Rapids, Michigan the Vice Chair and Mayor Denis Lapointe of Salaberry de Valleyfield, Québec became the Secretary/Treasurer of the organization.



Mayor Gary Becker, Dr. Gail Krantzberg, John Jackson and Mayor George Heartwell of the 'Marshall Plan' for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence panel

The panels showcased at the conference emphasized the vitality, prosperity, sustainability theme, starting with **A 'Marshall Plan' for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence**. The panel was moderated by Mayor Heartwell who stressed the need to gain a better understanding of the environmental issues facing communities on the Lakes and River and actions being taken to address them. Mayor Gary Becker of Racine, Wisconsin drew attention to the 2007 *Local Investment in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence* report by the Cities Initiative and the Great Lakes Commission which documented a local government investment of over \$15 billion annually to

protect and restore the Lakes and River. Mayor Becker emphasized that the commitment of local governments to invest in solutions to environmental challenges must be matched with leadership and investment from federal, state, and provincial governments. Panelist John Jackson, Director of Clean Production with Great Lakes United, followed with a review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. He examined how current governance structures delay progress and outlined necessary steps for federal governments that would improve management policy structures. Dr. Gail Krantzberg, Director of the Dofasco Centre for Engineering and Public Policy at McMaster University, provided an overview of the increasingly complex threats to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence, including aging infrastructure, legacy sediments and emerging pollutants, aquatic invasive species and climate change. The panel made it clear that a cooperative shared management regime with accountability, that reflects new scientific and policy advances in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, is needed.

In the spirit of cooperation, Mayor Peterson and Minister of the Environment for the Province of Ontario, John Gerretsen, signed, and Mayor Miller witnessed, a memorandum of cooperation through which the Cities Initiative and the Ontario Government agree to engage and consult with Ontario municipalities as the Ontario Government enters negotiations on the

Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (COA). This significant agreement illustrates the commitment of the Cities Initiative to work with other orders of government to ensure the resource is protected and restored.



Mayor David Miller, Mayor Lynn Peterson and Minister John Gerretsen sign the COA Memorandum of Cooperation

Mayor Lapointe introduced the *Protégeons le fleuve Saint Laurent/Let's protect the St. Lawrence* panel by providing a history of the St. Lawrence River, and by conveying the passion Quebec residents have for the river. Panelist Philippe Morel, Director of Strategic Initiatives with Environment Canada, described the unique pressures facing the St. Lawrence and called for an integrated governance structure with an ecosystem approach involving local governments, citizens and a broad range of stakeholders working together. Nicolas Audet, Executive Director of Stratégies Saint-Laurent, a non-governmental organization that represents, coordinates and supports Priority Intervention Zone (ZIP) committees, explored the progress being made on the St. Lawrence through the work of ZIP committees. ZIP committees were designed to protect, restore, and conserve the resource and work closely with municipalities to foster local initiatives that promote sustainable development on the St. Lawrence.



Mayor Denis Lapointe, Nicolas Audet and Philippe Morel participate on the *Protégeons le fleuve Saint Laurent/Let's protect the St. Lawrence* panel

Mayor Peterson moderated ***The Ups and Downs of Water Levels*** panel which addressed changing water levels as a serious issue on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration DEVELOP National Program interns Deivya Bansal and Mehul Nahar, who worked with the Cities Initiative during the spring and summer of 2008, displayed striking images of Great Lakes water level projections based on 30 years



Pete Johnson, Sam Speck, Mayor Lynn Peterson, and Mayor Ellen Anderson of the *Ups and Downs of Water Levels* panel

of historical data. Town of the Blue Mountains Mayor Ellen Anderson addressed the costly impact that lower water levels have on the environment and cities, and called for federal funding to remediate damage caused by low water levels and action to investigate the cause of changing lake levels. Sam Speck, Commissioner of the International Joint Commission (IJC) provided an overview of the IJC's Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study and the International Upper Great Lakes Study, two efforts which are exploring the water levels issue in depth. Program Director with the Council of Great Lakes Governors, Pete Johnson, updated conference participants on the quickly developing progress of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact in the U.S. Congress.

The first day of the conference ended with a dinner held at the Palais Royale on the shores of Lake Ontario. The evening included a special salutation from the Honorable Donna Cansfield, Minister of Natural Resources for the Province of Ontario. The beautiful location at Palais Royale allowed guests to enjoy the waterfront while listening to live music performances by Global Blues, a revue of Toronto-based musicians.



Keynote speaker  
Cameron Davis

Cameron Davis, President and CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, opened the final day of the conference with a morning keynote address. Mr. Davis, representing the nongovernmental organization perspective, called for greater accountability with respect to the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, for which there is currently no tracking and little accountability. Mr. Davis encouraged more federal leadership to execute existing policies and he pointed to the Cities Initiative as a unique force to build momentum and create a strong working vision that successfully brings cities to policy decision making tables as equal partners.

Mayor Dave Ross from the City of Superior, which shares the largest port by volume on the Great Lakes with the City of Duluth, introduced the panel ***Driving Prosperity, Vitality and Sustainability in the Great Lakes***. Industry and shipping are critically important for the economy in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region, with the Great Lakes states and provinces accounting for nearly 39 percent of U.S.-Canadian trade with the world and 62 percent of total U.S. and Canadian two-way trade. The panel provided city leaders with ideas on how to build on that success to help local economies and the broader region continue to prosper.



Mayor Dave Ross, George Kuper, Elyse Allan and Leo Gerard of the *Driving Prosperity, Vitality and Sustainability in the Great Lakes* panel

George Kuper, President and CEO of the Council of Great Lakes Industries, began the panel by reviewing several economic studies that demonstrate the return on investment from environmental projects and by recognizing cities as partners with industry. *Healthy Waters Strong Economy: The Benefits of Restoring a Great Lakes Ecosystem* by the Brookings Institution found that restoration efforts in the Great Lakes could lead to at least \$50 billion in economic gains to the region. *The Vital Connection: Reclaiming Great Lakes Economic Leadership in the Bi-National US-Canadian Region*, also by the Brookings Institution, underlines the economic advantages of investing in the environment. Elyse Allan, President and CEO of GE Canada, discussed how innovation can be an economic engine to make the region a world leader, particularly through the adaptation of newer technology to drive economic growth and by attracting skilled human capital to build and sustain the economy. Leo Gerard, President of the United Steelworkers Union, represented the union’s interest in creating green jobs and urged local governments to be the driving force in a green economy.



Keynote speaker  
Mayor Richard M. Daley

The final keynote speaker of the conference was Mayor Richard M. Daley of the City of Chicago, Founding United States Chair of the Cities Initiative and a Director on the Board. In his remarks, he praised the Cities Initiative for advancing the charge for investment in protection and restoration to achieve environmental benefits and to promote social gains and economic returns. Mayor Daley highlighted Chicago’s commitment to the environment in his presentation on the City’s bid for the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, of which Chicago is one of four candidate cities. In a show of support for the City of Chicago and the opportunity to advance reinvestment in the region and to highlight the significance of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, Cities Initiative members passed a resolution supporting Chicago’s bid for the 2016 Games at the Members Meeting.

Mayor Miller moderated the final panel, entitled ***Sustainable Cities Leading the Way*** and shared with delegates exciting sustainable developments occurring in the City of Toronto. The City has already met Kyoto carbon reduction targets and is spending \$2 million on greening vehicles and investing in other environmental projects that result in cost savings. Mayor Helen Fotopolus of the Plateau Mount-Royal Borough in Montreal highlighted the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development for Montreal which strives for economically efficient, socially equitable and ecologically sustainable regional growth. Mayor Larry MacDonald of Bayfield, Wisconsin, a city with a population of 618, shared the City's sustainability efforts that focus on reducing human impact on the environment through a working partnership with residents. The ingenuity and initiative of these diverse cities provided delegates with innovative ideas on how to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence and reduce the carbon footprint of cities.



Mayor David Miller, Mayor Helen Fotopolus, and Mayor Larry MacDonald participate on the *Sustainable Cities Leading the Way* panel

## AWARDS LUNCHEON

Through the generous sponsorship of the Wege Foundation, the Cities Initiative hosted the inaugural Awards Luncheon to conclude the Annual Meeting and Conference. The Town of Ajax received the second annual Wege Small Cities Sustainability Best Practices Award. The award of \$5,000 is given as seed money to a Cities Initiative member with a population of less than 100,000 for a Great Lakes-St. Lawrence project that balances economic, social, and environmental aspects and that can be used as a best practice in other communities. Ajax received this year's Wege Award for the Town's outstanding efforts to improve their nearshore water quality.



Mayor Lynn Peterson presents Ajax Councillor Joanne Dies with the 2008 Wege Award

Cities participating in the Cities Initiative Water Conservation Framework were also recognized at the luncheon. Mayor Peterson commended the 33 participating cities that are working to reduce water use by 15 percent from year 2000 levels by the year 2015 within their jurisdictions. Mayor Peterson was happy to announce that already twelve cities have collectively achieved a seven percent reduction.

## CONCLUSION

This year's Annual Meeting and Conference marked the five year anniversary of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. In the past five years, the organization has strengthened the municipal voice around the Lakes and River and is growing strong with 60 members from around the region. Cities are taking the lead in efforts to conserve water, reduce pollution and invest in projects to ensure the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence region remains sustainable for generations to come.

The Annual Meeting and Conference demonstrated and inspired action by local governments to continue investing in the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. Members of the Cities Initiative, working with other orders of government and stakeholders, will continue making progress through the resolutions and goals set at the meeting. The organization is proud of its accomplishments and looks forward to another successful year.

*For presentations and resolutions from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative 2008 Annual Meeting and Conference, please visit [www.glslcities.org](http://www.glslcities.org).*

*The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a coalition of sixty Canadian and U.S. mayors and other elected officials that works with federal, provincial, state, first nation and tribal government partners to advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.*

