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EOWC Appoints Chair and Vice-Chair for 2021

Eastern Ontario, January 11, 2021 – The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC), at its annual inaugural meeting last week, appointed Warden Debbie Robinson as the 2021 Chair and Warden Liz Danielsen as the 2021 Vice-Chair, both by acclamation.

Debbie Robinson is Warden of the County of Renfrew and the Reeve of the Township of Laurentian Valley. Liz Danielsen is Warden of the County of Haliburton and Deputy Mayor of the Township of Algonquin Highlands. Both have previously been members of the EOWC and bring valuable experience to their positions.

The EOWC Chair and Vice-Chair serve as the main point of contact for the Caucus and play a leadership role in helping to ensure that key EOWC priorities and advocacy move forward. Both positions are one-year terms, each filled by one of the 13 EOWC members. Appointments are based on a vote by the EOWC members or, in the case of a single candidate, an acclamation.

“I am honoured to lead this incredible group of dedicated municipal politicians as the 2021 Chair of the EOWC and represent the County of Renfrew. As Chair, I will continue to advocate on behalf of the 103 municipalities and the 750,000 property taxpayers across rural eastern Ontario,” stated Chair Robinson. “Over the past year, the EOWC showed its resiliency, efficiency and leadership on behalf of the region. We were able to respond quickly and effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic and make progress on our priorities and advocacy. I look forward to working closely with Vice-Chair Danielsen and fellow Caucus members to deliver results in the coming year for eastern Ontario and our residents.”

“The EOWC’s greatest strength is its ability to speak with a one, strong regional voice at the decision-making table. As we work toward advancing EOWC priorities in 2021, we will continue to work closely with the provincial and federal governments, as well as key partners, in order to best serve our region’s communities,” stated Vice-Chair Danielsen.

For the purposes of good continuity and given the COVID-19 pandemic health and economic impact, the EOWC agreed to stay the course of its 2020 priorities for the initial months of 2021. This will inform meetings and advocacy during the multi-ministerial delegations at the virtual 2021 Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference: *Connecting Rural Ontario*, being held on January 25 and 26, 2021.

The EOWC has a long history of working collaboratively with the Province and looks forward to sharing its insight and recommendations. The Caucus will re-evaluate its strategic plan and priorities during the priority-setting EOWC meeting held in March 2021, as it has done in the past.



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The EOWC's priorities heading into 2021 include:

- Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN) Cellular Network Gap and Mobile Broadband Improvement Project
- Long-Term Care
- Municipal Recovery
- Affordable Housing

Eastern Ontario Regional Network 2021 Update

As part of the EOWC Inaugural 2021 meeting, the Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN) reported to the EOWC that it would finalize details of the Cell Gap project and begin construction in 2021.

“This public-private partnership of more than \$213-million will get at the many areas where cell service is poor or non-existent,” said EORN Chair J. Murray Jones. “Demand for cell service is growing as people depend more and more on smartphones and tablets for work, social connections, entertainment and to access public services.”

During the pandemic, EORN and EOWC continued to advocate for improved broadband connectivity. This included developing the EORN Gig Project – a fibre-based solution aimed at addressing the issue across the region for a generation.

Currently, major federal and provincial governments broadband funding programs are structured to support municipal-level projects rather than coordinated, regional projects. EORN recommended that EOWC members pursue county-level projects to achieve greater coverage and economies of scale.

“We remain dedicated to bringing greater connectivity to the region. While we wait to see if other funding becomes available for the Gig Project, we look forward to supporting EOWC members as they pursue funding,” shared EOWC Chair Debbie Robinson. “EORN has extensive regional experience and technical knowledge it can bring to member municipalities to help them navigate the process.”

- 30 -

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