

## **Mayor White and Eden Mills group featured at ROMA convention**

**By Rebecca Ring**

**The New Tanner**

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As Chair of Rural Ontario Association of Municipalities, Mayor Chris White played a key role at its annual convention last week. He made speeches, introduced speakers and invited the Eden Mills Going Carbon Neutral project organizers to present its plan and progress to about 1600 delegates from across Ontario.

At the convention, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced another \$150 million in funding for municipal infrastructure, in addition to the previously announced \$300 million. "These funds help us move ahead with infrastructure needs," says White, "This year we're replacing four bridges with COMRIFF funding."

"These conventions are important because it gives us a chance to bring our municipal and county issues directly in front of provincial and federal ministers and influence legislation that directly affects us," says White. He had the ear of cabinet ministers such as Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. He told them that the farm tax had to be uploaded by the province to ease the burden on the property tax payer. Farms pay 25% the rate of regular property tax. They used to pay 100%, and then get reimbursed 75% by the province, but this was one of many financial responsibilities downloaded onto municipalities by the previous Ontario government. "I have no objections to the farm tax rate," he says, "but I would like to see the province pay the 75% difference."

To Jim Bradley, Minister of Transportation, he said that rail transportation needs to become a priority, rather than building more 400 series highways. To the Minister of Agriculture, he said that agriculture needs to be taken into account when the provincial pesticide legislation is tabled. The province plans to ban the cosmetic use of pesticides for residential lawns.

White invited Eden Mills Going Carbon Neutral Project organizers to talk about their plans and progress. Charles Simon, Libby Little and Tim Laing spoke to a standing-room-only audience of about 800 people. They had special billing in a plenary session in the largest room. They made a half hour presentation, which featured clips of the project launch, interviews with area children, and the Carbon Neutral Choir performing their anthem.

Laing introduced the team and what they are trying to accomplish, which is for the village to produce no more carbon than it sequesters. Simon described their three-pronged approach. He explained that carbon dioxide is one of the major greenhouse gasses, which trap the sun's heat in the atmosphere. This results in an overall increase in global temperature, causing glacial melt, which affects the oceans currents, resulting in changed weather patterns (droughts, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.). Eden Mills Going Carbon Neutral aims to reduce fossil fuel use, a major source of carbon emissions; use

clean, renewable sources of energy, such as solar and wind power; and sequester CO<sup>2</sup> by planting trees and other plants that take up and store CO<sup>2</sup>.

Little described some of the projects that are already in full swing, such as the Garbage Alarm at Rockwood Centennial Public School, organized by Club Green. Classrooms compete to produce the least garbage with lunches, etc. The group thanked Councillor Doug Breen and the Trails Committee for their plans to establish a trail from Eden Mills to Rockwood; Councillor John Scott and the Environmental Stewardship Committee for its support and donation to Club Green; Wellington County's Green Legacy Program for its donation of trees that will be planted this spring; and White for his support and help in opening doors.

One of the key components of the program is measuring the "carbon footprint" of residents. Simon announced that an incredible 70% of the Eden Mills population contacted agreed to participate and a whopping 75% of those have completed the survey (52% of the population), and more keep coming in. Volunteers Linda Melnick and Brenda Taylor are coordinating University of Guelph students in conducting the survey. "This is an astounding response," he says, "The survey is quite involved in that respondents spend time looking up fuel bills, auto mileage, etc. This indicates a lot of support for the project." He was hoping to match results of the village of Ashton Hayes in Britain, which implemented its Going Carbon Neutral Program and were the inspiration for Eden Mills. About 40% of its residents participated in the survey.

Other key players in the presentation were producers Linda Sword and John Crompton, and filmmaker Les Zawadzki, who filmed and edited the video and arranged the multi-media presentation. "They put a lot of their own time and effort into this and the result is a very professional presentation," says Simon.

"The Going Carbon Neutral presentation was very well attended and very well received," says White, "Convention organizers were thrilled with it. They opened a lot of eyes and had the ears of provincial and municipal representatives. They put the township and the county at the forefront of the convention." He adds that the fact it is a grassroots initiative gives it an edge and a lot of great ideas were shared. He presented the group with a congratulatory certificate for their achievements. For more information and to view video clips, visit [www.goingcarbonneutral.ca](http://www.goingcarbonneutral.ca).