

Common Voice Northwest

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Common Voice Northwest Presents Grow North Response to Minister

Thunder Bay: After months of review by seven of their own Task Forces, four pan-northwestern organizations and their own Board of Directors, Common Voice Northwest today submitted a 172 page response to the proposed Growth Plan for Northern Ontario to Minister Michael Gravelle, co-chair of the Grow North Cabinet Committee.

Chair George Macey told the Minister that “Northern Ontario will be the economic engine of Ontario once again” and that while “traditional economic pillars of transportation, natural resources and government are in the process of evolving into a new economic base that can most succinctly be described as value-added, knowledge creation, and services, the Ontario Government must support and facilitate Northwestern Ontario’s transition to a value-added knowledge culture that generates high-end products and services based on the traditional resource-sector and transportation activities, as well as in the new areas of health research, education and the bio-economy.”

Key amongst Common Voice Northwest’s recommendations is a call for the creation of a Public Policy Institute for Northern Ontario (NOPPI). “The Institute would be developed in partnership with universities, colleges, Aboriginal organizations, regional and community stakeholders and would focus on Pan-Northern public policy issues. Independent from government, NOPPI will be created with a mission to analyze economic, business, and social issues and generate policy advice that can be applied to Northern Ontario’s economy and society, either for the entire North or for some of its geographic or sectoral components.” “ It is essential that NOPPI gets off the ground first as it will provide all leaders with the public policy advice essential for making the Grow North Plan work for us” said Macey.

Common Voice Northwest has recommended that the current Places to Grow Secretariat which is under the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure be split into two separate Secretariats with one focusing on Northern Ontario, attached to the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry and be physically located in the North. Its role will be to assist in the implementation of the Grow North report recommendations. To guide the Grow North Secretariate in facilitating and monitoring the implementation of the Northern Ontario Growth Plan, Common Voice Northwest wants a group of Northern Residents to be nominated by key organizations based in the North. Those organizations should include NOMA, FONOM, NOACC , North Eastern Chambers of Commerce Workforce Development Boards, Aboriginal Organizations, Post Secondary Institutions, NOSDA etc.

Common Voice Northwest wants the Province to work with them on a process that will examine whether “provincial decision making regarding life and the economy of Northern Ontario, will be devolved to those who live in the North’s two regions – Northwest, and North East - at a pace and a degree that is defined by the people of the region” said Marathon’s George Macey. “Just so were clear, we are not definitively saying that we want the decision making transferred to us, but we want to have that discussion amongst the people of the North so that we can put forward a common position to the Government.”

Common Voice Northwest also wants Northwestern Ontario designated as one of the Economic Zones proposed in the Growth Plan and “that sufficient investment incentives should be provided by the Ontario Government to facilitate the evolution of the Zones. The Governance Body ‘managing’ the Economic Zone must be chosen by Northerners and remain accountable to them.”

The Common Voice Northwest response covered a range of topics and offered a total of 148 comments and or recommendations to the government. Some of the key areas included are:

Mining, forestry, Urban Aboriginal Services, Transportation, research and innovation, health, education, regional economic planning, attracting investment and growth as well as social policy issues are all policy areas touched by the Common Voice Northwest review.

The final document is a collaborative effort of a broad range of individuals and organizations from across the Northwest. Common Voice Northwest challenged its Task Forces, and member organizations to examine their sections of the Proposed Growth Plan for Northern Ontario. Those Task Forces met on a number of occasions to determine their responses. In addition, other groups were invited to submit their responses to CVNW for consideration. Well over 150 people representing at least 16 distinct Northwestern Ontario based organizations.

A copy of the full document is available for review at www.commonvoicenw.org.

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