



Deputy Mayor

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CHAIR, FEDERATION OF ONTARIO PUBLIC LIBRARIES
NIGHT ECONOMY CHAMPION, CITY OF TORONTO

Date: April 21, 2026

To: Mayor Olivia Chow, Chair and Executive Committee

Re: Report on Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative: Confluence Forum

Recommendation:

1. City Council receive the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative: Confluence Forum update for information.

Background

I am pleased to provide this update for your information following my attendance at the recent forum on behalf of Mayor Olivia Chow. This report summarizes the proceedings of the Confluence Forum hosted by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (GLSLCI) at Toronto City Hall on January 20, 2026. The forum brought together municipal leaders, conservation experts, and environmental advocates to discuss regional strategies for climate resilience, clean energy innovation, and the mitigation of plastic pollution within the Great Lakes basin.

1. Climate Resilience and Coastal Hazards: The primary focus of the forum was the "Adapting to Coastal Hazards Across the Great Lakes" program led by Conservation Ontario. This federally funded initiative assesses the social, environmental, and economic impacts of climate change across three specific pilot areas: Western Lake Ontario (Niagara to Halton), Southern Lake Huron, and Northern Lake Superior. The program aims to strengthen the capacity of Conservation Authorities to support municipal planning and protect shorelines from erosion and flooding. These regional efforts align with Toronto's ongoing development of a citywide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, scheduled for 2026.

2. Nuclear Innovation and Clean Energy: The forum explored the role of nuclear energy in Ontario's clean energy frontier, specifically through presentations by the Nuclear Innovation Institute. Discussion focused on how municipalities can leverage nuclear technology to meet net-zero targets while supporting regional economic development. This session highlighted the importance of a diverse energy mix to ensure long-term grid reliability and carbon reduction across the Great Lakes region.

3. Addressing Plastic Pollution and the "Plastics Menace": Research presented by the University of Toronto's Rochman Lab and Oceana Canada underscored the critical levels of microplastics found in the Great Lakes, particularly near urban centers like Toronto. Key points included:

- **Source Reduction:** Advocacy for expanding municipal by-laws to include large venues and mandating reusable containers for dine-in operations to cut waste at the source.
- **Bylaw Implementation:** Discussions on "Ask-First" approaches for single-use items and the potential for three-year phase-in periods for small businesses to install necessary infrastructure, such as dishwashers, to support reuse systems.

- Monitoring: The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) continues to monitor high concentrations of microplastics in local waters and fish, necessitating standardized regional monitoring and producer responsibility.

4. Toronto's Leadership and Strategic Actions: As the host city, Toronto highlighted its progress under the Single-Use and Takeaway Items (SUTI) by-law, which became active on March 1, 2024. The City is currently exploring additional measures to reduce litter and protect waterways, including future reports from the Solid Waste Management Services Division on mandating reusables for dine-in services. The forum concluded with a commitment to continued collaboration across the basin, leading up to the 2026 Annual Conference in Hamilton, Ontario.

Sincerely,



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