



Conference examined demographic shift and economy

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The message portrayed at a first-of-its-kind Northern Policy Institute conference didn't come as a surprise to Dan Hollingsworth.

The executive director of business development at the Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corp. said the conference, appropriately themed State of the North, explored the issues that Northern communities are facing.

"It was a good gathering with lots of attendance that gave us the lay of the land of the economy and where it may be heading for municipalities, smaller communities and First Nation communities," Hollingsworth told The Sault Star. "The message was pretty consistent with what we know and with what we've been experiencing."

The Northern Policy Institute held its inaugural conference in Timmins last week focusing on the north's changing demographics, the challenges of replacing a skilled workforce and specifically how the demographics and workforce issues relate to youth.

The conference examined potential solutions to combat the declining and aging population.

Hollingsworth said that there was some interesting information that emerged about rising trends and opportunities for youth.

Sales and management administration positions will become more readily available in the future as a result of those leaving the workforce, he said.

“We heard that youth in the North are better positioned to get jobs in those growth occupations more than in the south, mainly because of the demographics but those entering the science occupations will find it harder to find career jobs in Northern Ontario,” Hollingsworth said.

The expected skilled trade shortage, already being noticed in many of the markets now, will continue to be a problem. Communities and stakeholders will need to pinpoint the issues and work collectively to develop a workforce of the future, he said.

“This is a message that needs to be amplified to all the groups that are responsible for looking at these sorts of things,” he said. “We really need to further identify the needs of the industry for the future and get proper training programs in place to prepare.”

Hollingsworth said the future workforce in five or 10 years is going to be very different from what it is now.

The city will continue to focus on its key industries like advance manufacturing, lottery and gaming, renewable energy, the digital economy and aviation/aerospace.

And it will continue to monitor labour force trends and participation rates, he said.

The workshops also took a look at the North’s demographics and explored other issues like future transportation needs, said Linda Savory-Gordon.

As a member of the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains, Savory-Gordon said her interest was looking at how the demographics relate to transportation networks.

CAPT has argued that passenger trains across Northern Ontario offer a safer, more environmentally friendly mode of transportation that is also more comfortable for aging demographics.

“They can get back and forth to family who have moved away or even to medical appointments that are not in their own community,” she said.

Strong transportation networks are also important to immigrants, many who come from places with strong passenger rail networks.

Passenger trains also allow them to communicate with their ethnic group from other parts of the province while also allowing them to venture into more rural areas for work, she said.

The Northern Policy Institute is a non-partisan, not-for-profit institution providing fair, balanced and objective assessments of policy issues in a pan-Northern context.

It provides evidence-based solutions, for and from Northern Ontario.

Its focus is to improve measurement, building sustainable community capacity and enhancing self-sufficiency to the region at large while examining the six areas of the Northern Growth Policy, including the economy, people, communities, infrastructure, environment and Aboriginal peoples.