



## **Letter from Chair Billy McKinney - 2022 Annual General Meeting Overview**

My name is Billy McKinney and I am the Mayor of Zion, Illinois, and the new Chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. I am reaching out to you today to report on this year's successful Annual Meeting, which was held in St. Catharines, Ontario, June 22-24, 2022.

First, I would like to thank our members for nominating me and providing me with the privilege and honor to serve you as our Chair. Our organization serves an extremely vital purpose for communities across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin, and I promise to serve you well over the next year.

I would also like to express my strong thanks and appreciation to Mayor Walter Sendzik and Mayor George Cornell for their outstanding service to the organization. Under their leadership, our organization has grown and prospered in its efforts to support our communities, and it's my hope to build on their tremendous achievements.

Additionally, I would like to welcome the incoming Board and Executive Committee and say how excited I am to work collaboratively with them. We have a tremendous amount of work to do, and I know we will continue to make a difference.

Finally, a special thank you to our 145 participants and to the Cities Initiative staff for making this year's Annual Meeting one the most successful in our organization's history.

Our detailed discussions regarding the "Blue Economy," and our members' valued guidance on how our organization should move forward in supporting the socioeconomic and environmental security of our communities, were extremely fruitful.

Among other decisions, the membership voted to support the creation of a "Blue Economy Taskforce" that will work to promote Blue Economy issues for our cities. Brownfield transformation, tourism, and water innovation will be at the heart of this taskforce.

Please feel free to reach out to [Phillipe.Murphy-Rheume](#) if you wish to serve on this Blue Economy Taskforce.

## High-Profile Speakers

We were fortunate to hear from government officials and technical experts from all over the world during our sessions. Some of our speakers included:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan
- The Honorable Terry Duguid, Parliament Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change of Canada
- Chair Brenda Mallory of the U.S. Council of Environmental Quality
- Cassie Flynn, Strategic Advisor to the U.N. on Climate Change
- Former Toronto Mayor David Miller
- Aquanaut Fabien Cousteau
- The Honorable Chantal Rouleau, Minister for Transport for the Province of Quebec
- The Honorable Vance Badawey, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services
- Senator Tammy Duckworth of Illinois
- Stewart Colovin, Executive Vice President, Global Brand Strategy, MMGY

## Strategic Initiatives

The membership formally approved our strategic initiatives for 2022-2025. These initiatives include:

Water Equity - Develop resources, capacity and knowledge to ensure equitable access to high-quality water resources, services and opportunities for municipalities and their citizens.

Blue Economy – Help municipalities sustainably and responsibly leverage economic benefits from local freshwater resources to create an attractive region for all to live, work and play.

Ecosystem Protection – Build the capacity of mayors and their communities to be an effective force in advancing the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin.

Climate Change & Coastal Resilience – Help municipalities plan for and take action to strengthen their resiliency to impacts from climate change with a focus on the coastal zone.

The Board and our staff look forward to advancing these initiatives in the coming months.

## 2023 Annual Meeting

Our members have selected Chicago, Illinois for our next Annual Meeting. The meeting is planned for June 7-9, 2023. Please plan on joining us in Chicago next year as we celebrate our 20th anniversary and chart a path for continued success!