

CITY HALL

Sousa and Crombie talk budget

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Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa and Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie met Wednesday (Feb. 22) to discuss local funding issues amid resurgent and refocused efforts in Peel to lobby Queen's Park for more provincial dollars.

The tête-à-tête at Mississauga city hall was arranged to brief Sousa on local funding priorities ahead of his next provincial budget.

Sousa, who is also MPP for Mississauga South, said he was pleased with how his conversation with Crombie went and the subsequent meetings with other council members.

Just last month, Sousa and other area politicians at Queen's Park and in the House of Commons were the target of some harsh criticism from members of

regional council, who believe their representatives in upper-tier government are not doing enough to get Peel its fair share of funding dollars.

The tirade ended with council agreeing to orchestrate a summit, including with other 905-area municipalities and school boards, to discuss underfunding and develop a strategy for pressuring the province for a bigger piece of Ontario's funding pie.

Led by outspoken Ward 5 Coun. Carolyn Parrish, Mississauga volunteered to host the one- or two-day conference.

Sousa said he welcomed these opportunities to meet with Ontario mayors and, in particular, mayors and council members in Peel, where municipal financial pressures are significant.

It's a chance to help determine the priorities in his next provincial budget.

Crombie focused discussion on infrastructure and

transit investment in Mississauga, as well as creating sustainable, predictable levels of funding.

In an interview afterward, Sousa conceded many local needs are greater than other parts of the province, but he reiterated a string of funding commitments that have been made to Mississauga and steps taken to unload municipal financial burdens to Queen's Park.

Sousa explained he is trying to weigh the demands of the entire province, while Ontario is also trying to get its fair share from the federal government.

"We provide \$11 billion more to the rest of Canada than we take in, even when we qualify for equalization," he stressed. "So I'm trying to recognize there's only one taxpayer here. We've got to find a way to work collectively for the benefit of communities and our constituents."