

DoKURA NEWS

Fall 2020

Welcome to the Winter 2020 newsletter for DoKURA (The District of Kenora Unincorporated Areas Ratepayers Association).

Over the past few months the association's directors have been busy tracking several issues that impact the non-municipal areas of the region, as well as planning how to hold the association's Annual General Meeting in this era of CoVID restrictions.

AGM VIA ZOOM

Rather than the normal in-person AGM, the association has opted to follow the lead of other groups and hold its annual meeting via the Internet. The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 17, and will use the Zoom program. Members wishing to take part should contact director Barry Baltessen - bbaltessen@gmail.com - for instructions on accessing the meeting.

PLT BILLS DELAYED

For those wondering what happened to this summer's final 2020 Provincial Land Tax bill, it will be issued in October, with payment dates staggered through November and December.

The bills - issued through the City of Thunder Bay tax office - also include provincial education taxes, Local Roads Boards levies and Local Service Board levies where they apply.

In addition to CoVID tax relief measures that impacted the issuing of property tax bills and due dates for payments, the government has also delayed the imposition of re-assessed property tax values by one year. All properties in Ontario were re-assessed last year by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation and updated to reflect market values as of Jan. 1, 2020. This is part of the province's regular four-year cycle of property re-assessment. However, rather than taking effect for the 2021 tax year, the new values will take effect in 2022.

Values used for the 2021 tax year, will be the same as those used for 2020 unless your property has been re-assessed due to a recent sale or major renovation/construction work.

CoVID measures have not impacted the final phase-in of increased PLT rates begun in 2017. Those rates have been raised each year towards a target of \$250 per \$100,000 of assessed value for all residential properties. Rates for properties within school tax areas have been rising by \$5 annually, and \$40 annually for those outside school areas as their former rate was much

lower. The rates for 2020 are \$247 per \$100,000 for school area properties and \$235 for non-school tax areas. In 2021 they will be \$250 per \$100,000 for all PLT areas. Commercial/industrial property tax rates have also been increasing as part of the PLT rate changes and will be a universal \$300 per \$100,000 of assessed value in 2021.

HYDRO RATES UNCERTAIN

In March the government suspended the use of time-of-use electricity rates for residential and commercial customers purchasing their electricity through the province's Regulated Price Plan - impacting some five million residential and small business customers. Rates from March 24 to May 31 were set at a fixed 10.1 cents per kwh, and from June 1 to October 31 at 12.8 cents. As of late August, there had been no announcements about what will happen after October 31.

The government may opt for a return to time-of-use rates with the Ontario Energy Board setting the rates based on predicted cost of generation and purchase for the coming year, it may continue with its suspension of time-of-use rates with the possibility of a new fixed rate being set, or it may decide to allow customers to choose between time-of-use and a fixed rate which was part of the government's election promises in 2018. Meanwhile, long term changes to Hydro One's rate structure - the sole provider of electrical service in non-municipal areas in this region - are continuing with a shift from a fixed monthly rate plus a per kwh charge, to a fully fixed rate. This change was begun in 2016 and will be completed by 2024. For those using their residence as a year-round, permanent home the changes are not reflected in bills due to a Distribution Rate Protection (DRP) plan cap on delivery charges. The cap is currently \$36.86 per month, unchanged from 2019-2022 and in effect until July of 2021.

Seasonal class Hydro One customers are not eligible for rate subsidies and may have noticed changes in their bills depending on their electricity use. High volume users (primarily electric heating) will have experienced total bill reductions, while low-volume users (using minimal amounts of electricity in the off-season) will notice increases this coming winter.

Of greater potential impact to seasonal customers in this area is a proposal to end the Seasonal Class rates and move customers into standard residential classes, but without the rate subsidies now provided to permanent residents. Most Hydro One permanent residential customers of this region are in the Low

Density rate class and their service rates are much higher than Seasonal rates before the current subsidies are applied.

This change in rate classes has been under study since 2015 and the Ontario Energy Board continues to review submissions on the plan.

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Residents in the areas around the municipality of Machin and north of Kenora could have improved land ambulance service in the next year or so.

Following a motion approved at the 2019 DoKURA annual meeting, a letter was sent to the Kenora District Services Board requesting it review ambulance service in the Machin area. The Municipality of Machin is the only one in the district without an ambulance base and service is provided by ambulances dispatched from Dryden, Ear Falls or Kenora depending on availability. Following a review of call volumes and response times the service board determined an upgrade in service was warranted. Whether this will be through the building of base at Vermilion Bay – the preference of Machin council and DoKURA – or by adding an ambulance and crew to the Dryden base has yet to be decided. Either option will improve response times.

The Kenora District Services board has also be working with band councils from Wabaseemoong Independent Nations (Whitedog) and Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (Grassy Narrows) on establishing land ambulance bases in those communities. Those areas are currently served by ambulances dispatched from Kenora, with travel times of an hour or more each way. If the bases are approved by the Ministry of Health it will reduce response times for the First Nation communities and for rural residents in surrounding areas.

FOLLOW UPS

In January members of the DoKURA board met with local MPP Greg Rickford seeking his assistance on a number of issues. A presentation was also made to the provincial budget committee touring the region in early February.

Issues discussed included government plans for the Turtle Portage boat transfer facility, electricity rates and provincial subsidies, Provincial Land Tax rates, support for local roads and extension of 911 service.

Director Barry Baltessen will be providing a report on government actions as part of the AGM, but currently the Turtle Portage question is the only one the government has acted on. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry announced in August it would be making a one-time investment in the facility this year to upgrade the dock and ensure it continues to operate for another year.

While welcomed, this only a temporary measure. The MNR remains committed to its plan to de-commission the facility unless a local group steps forward to operate it.

DIRECTORS AT WORK

Board of directors members continue to work with various groups/organizations in the area providing input on the concerns of the unincorporated areas.

DoKURA continues to look for people – year-round or seasonal residents - from the unincorporated areas interested in serving on, or working with the board.

The DoKURA board makeup allows for Directors At Large in addition to the four Kenora District Services Board members elected for each of its four wards or areas, Directors At Large are elected at Annual General Meetings and serve two-year terms.

If you are interested in serving or working with the DoKURA board please contact us at dokuraorg@hotmail.com

KEEPING YOU INFORMED

Keeping people in unincorporated areas informed of the issues that impact them is a challenge. If you are receiving this newsletter on behalf of a group or organization, please assist us by distributing it to your members, or have them contact us to be added to our email distribution list.

<http://www.dokura.com> / dokuraorg@hotmail.com