

DoKURA NEWS

Spring/Summer 2023

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2023 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.

Connecting with our Subscribers

We are working to improve our communications and engagement with subscribers. Recently, we sent an email to all our subscribers asking to confirm interest in receiving electronic communications from our organization and update our contact list information. Thanks to those who we've already heard from. IF WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM YOU, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO PROVIDE YOUR UPDATES USING THIS

LINK...[Sign-up form](#). This link can also be used by individuals or organizations who are not currently receiving our emails but would like to be kept informed about issues impacting residents in the unincorporated areas within the Kenora District. DoKURA respects the privacy of its members and will safeguard their personal information, protect it from misuse and will be transparent and accountable for how it is used. While not bound by Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL) & the Personal Information Protection & Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA), DoKURA has adopted a policy that reflects the principles of PIPEDA.

We assure our subscribers that our contact list information will never be sold or shared with other individuals or organizations. Our messages will only be sent to individuals or organizations who have provided prior consent and will include the rationale for why a person or organization is receiving a message from us & expressly advise them that they can unsubscribe at any time. We will provide contact information to enable direct feedback from subscribers.

DoKURA will never ask for funds, but may advertise fundraising events. DoKURA's Secretary will serve as Compliance Officer and will conduct periodic reviews to ensure the security of our website and email address. Additional information about DoKURA, is available on our [website](#).

Look for us at Celebrate Lake Life on Saturday, June 24th, a day full of fun, food, & entertainment hosted by Lake of the Woods District Stewardship Association at the Janel Contracting Pavilion, formerly the Whitecap Pavilion, on the Kenora Harbourfront.

9-1-1 Everywhere in Ontario Act

Recently, the provincial NDP introduced a bill to improve 9-1-1 service in Ontario. DoKURA offered a letter of support which can be accessed by clicking on <https://dokura.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Letter-of-Support-for-9-1-1-service-2023.pdf>

The NDP press release can be accessed using the following link: [T9-1-1 Everywhere in Ontario Act](#)

SAVE THE DATE

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday, September 21, 2023. We are looking at a hybrid meeting with both in-person and virtual attendance possible. A revision to our bylaws to comply with revised Ontario Not-For-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA) regulations will be reviewed and voted on. Additional details, including the agenda, will be available in August.

KDSB ELECTION RESULTS

On October 24, 2022 municipal, school board and district services board elections were conducted across Ontario. There are 4 seats allocated to Unincorporated Wards for representation on the Kenora District Services Board. As a result of this election, your representatives on the Kenora District Services Board are:

Lac Seul – Mark Sobchuck (Returning)

Lake of the Woods North – Barry Baltessen (Returning - Acclaimed)

Lake of the Woods South – Dennis Wallace

Oxdrift – Laurie Huffman

This year's election was conducted using a vote-by-mail process for the first time. As a result, there was a significant increase in voter turnout and increased awareness for the services delivered by the KDSB.

Voter Turnout by Ward:

Lac Seul – 12%

Oxdrift – 13.2%

LOW South – 10.5%

Using vote-by mail uncovered a number of challenges faced by people living the Unincorporated Wards, particularly around receiving mail in a timely manner or having accurate mailing information from organizations like the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). Voter kits had to be designed in-line with the published election guidelines established by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, which resulted in some confusion with voters due to similarities with the Municipal and School Board ballots. There were also issues identified with the completeness and accuracy of the MPAC data provided to generate the voter lists.

KDSB will be working with the Province and Elections Ontario to continue to improve the election process. Elections Ontario has committed that the KDSB will be able to use and work with their data to develop voter lists for the 2026 election cycle. The KDSB is exploring options that would see the District use an electronic or internet-based voting process for the 2026 election. This will be subject to the financial budget provided to the KDSB by MCCSS in order to conduct the elections. The goal is to continue to improve voter turnout within the Unincorporated Wards.

STARLINK REBATES

The Kenora District Services Board is launching the second round of rebates for high-speed internet. People who purchased a Starlink system on or after September 1st, 2022 can receive a rebate of 75 or up to 90 percent on federal lands, towards the cost of the system. The rebate also covers the cost of shipping and taxes paid.

This new program reopened on May 18 and closes on November 3rd, 2023 or until the project funding is used up. Rebates will be provided on a first come, first serve basis.

Those interested in applying must provide:

- Proof of kit purchase on or after September 1, 2022
- Photo of installed Starlink kit
- Location of installed Starlink kit (Google Plus Code or Street Address)
- Speed Test results

This is part of the KDSB's Connecting the Kenora District initiative. For further information

<https://kdsb.on.ca/connecting-the-kenora-district-is-back-for-round-2/>

Provincial Land Tax (PLT) & the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC)

Property taxes and the prospect of increases always focus the mind. The District of Kenora Unincorporated Rate Payers Association (DoKURA) directors have been working on this matter for the past year in support of rural property owners. Progress has been made but thorny issues remain.

PLT Reform was led by the Ontario Ministry of Finance to achieve equity among residents and businesses in unincorporated areas and produce similar but not identical to municipal co-funding of core services. It began with a review and consultations in 2013, a final report and phase-in of new tax rates in 2016 and has been in place for several years.

The current delayed re-assessment of all properties in Ontario, a joint effort by MPAC and the Ministry of Finance, may result in significant increases for unincorporated area taxpayers. Rising property tax valuations would automatically trigger an increase in PLT assessments, unless the current mechanism for calculating PLT is amended to account for the significant increase in valuations, which could be double the 2016 assessed values. DoKURA has been meeting with Ministry of Finance officials to ensure the continuation of fair co-funding of core services.

It appears unlikely that MPAC will send out revised valuation letters for the 2024 tax year since this would need to be done by May 2023 in order to print and send the notices and allow property owners adequate time to request reassessments when concerns are raised. This will push implementation of reassessments to 2025, eight years past the last MPAC adjustment for the 2017 – 2020 tax years.

During our discussions with the Ministry of Finance, we asked the Ministry to consider a more open process and accounting as to what property owners in TWOMO pay for in their tax bills. We indicated a desire to better understand how services are identified to ensure that there is fair TWOMO cost sharing compared to municipalities. Essentially, we asked if it would be possible to provide information to rate payers in the unincorporated area that shows revenues and expenditures for TWOMO taxes. While no assurances were given by the Ministry of Finance, we will continue to press on this issue.

Redditt Fire Hall Receives NOHFC Grant

The Local Services Board of Redditt recently received \$180,000 to refurbish the Redditt Fire Hall through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation.

The grant will be used to refurbish and upgrade the Redditt Community Fire Hall to extend its service life and improve efficiency of operations. According to the Ontario government's release, the Local Services Board of Redditt will use the funding to modernize the fire hall by making safety updates to the office space, refurbishing the washroom, renovating the roof and truck bays, and improving interior and exterior lighting.

"A modern, well-functioning fire hall is key to helping firefighters provide first-rate emergency response services," said Greg Rickford, Minister of Northern Development. "NOHFC funding will increase the efficiency and service life of the fire hall and support the safety and well-being of our northern communities."

Ultra-Low Overnight Electricity Price Plan

The Ontario government is launching a new Ultra-Low Overnight price plan as part of its plan to provide consumers with more ways to keep costs down, save money and take control of their energy bills. Starting May 1, 2023, customers of Toronto Hydro, London Hydro, Centre Wellington Hydro, Hearst Power, Renfrew Hydro, Wasaga Distribution, and Sioux Lookout Hydro can opt-in to this new optional electricity price plan, with all utilities required to offer it to customers within six months.

To read more click here ...

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002916/ontario-launches-new-ultra-low-overnight-electricity-price-plan>

Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission Report

Northern Ontario could have one less riding in the next federal election if the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission report receives House of Commons approval. Northern Ontario currently has 10 federal ridings, but if the latest electoral map is approved, that will drop to nine the next time voters go to the polls.

The Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Ontario published its final report in February, which includes redrawn electoral maps for many parts of the province, including the north. Every 10 years the commission revisits the electoral map based on the latest census population data. The goal is for each district to have 116,590 voting age people in it. Although even with the new changes, all northern Ontario's ridings fall short of the quota.

Extensive lobbying from DoKURA as well as federal, provincial, and municipal elected officials in the District of Kenora did result in amendments that generally preserved the three existing ridings in our region.

The proposed redistribution was looking to reduce the number of ridings in our region by combining most of the population of the existing Kenora District and Thunder Bay—Rainy River District into Kenora—Thunder Bay—Rainy River and would create the new Electoral District of Kiiwetinoong—Mushkegowuk, a large and sparsely populated far north riding spanning from the Manitoba to Quebec border.

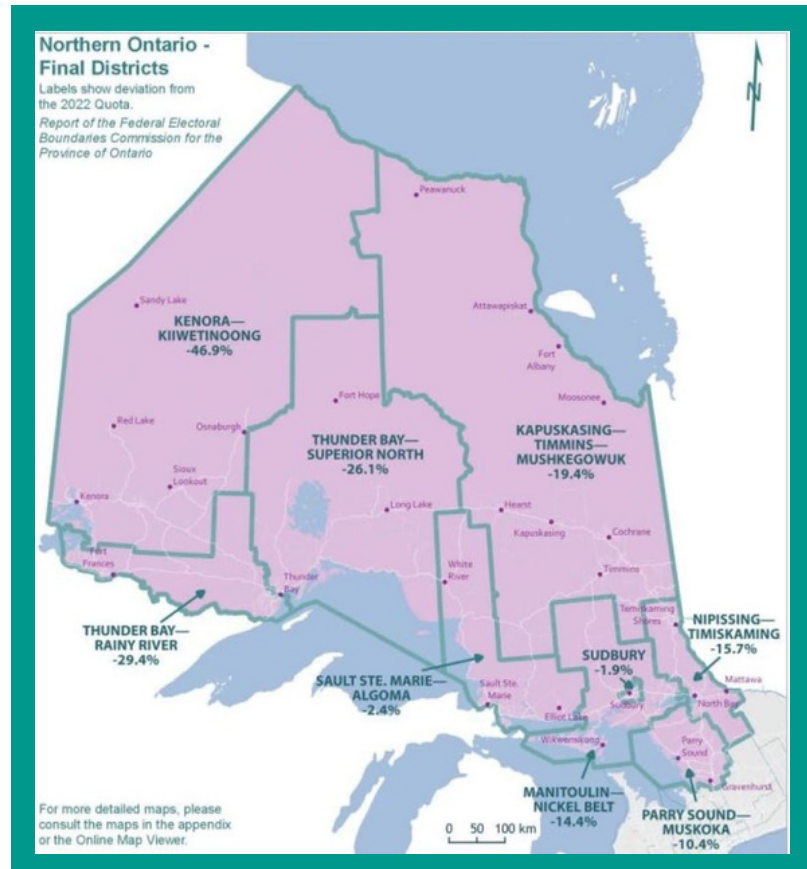
Turtle Portage marine railway system on Lake of the Woods is reopening

Retrofits are complete and the Turtle Portage marine railway system on Lake of the Woods is now open to the public. The site is safe and the boat transfer system is functional.

Please be advised of the following:

- Some users may find the hand wheel challenging to operate. The contractor is exploring options to make it easier, and will return to make adjustments.
- Be mindful of your transducer when loading your boat onto the cart as it may come into contact with the cart bunks.
- **BOATS MUST BE TIED DOWN TO ALL FOUR CLEATS ON THE CART.** Failure to do so may allow boats to slide off the cart during transport.

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Hydro Costs on the Rise for Some

The cost and reliability of electricity service is never far from the minds of most rural residents.

Over the past year DoKURA directors have met with officials and made submissions on electricity matters.

Seasonal Class Hydro One customers in the Lake of the Woods area, along with all others in the province were notified late last year about the elimination of the Seasonal rate class, an explanation for it, and its likely impact on their electrical bills.

The ending of the Seasonal rate class closes out a multi-year back-and-forth argument over maintaining the rate class between Hydro One and the province's regulatory agency, the Ontario Energy Board. Hydro One was the only utility in the province with unique service rates for its seasonal customers.

The impact of the change, with increases to be phased in over a 10-year period, will vary depending on electricity usage this year as the utility continues its move towards fully fixed monthly service charges. In this area, rural customers are being moved to the R2 class. Customers using no electricity, or a minimal amount will see about a \$7 monthly increase in charges (\$22 on a quarterly bill). The increase will drop as consumption rises and the reduction in the per kwh component of the service charge drops. That part of the Hydro One monthly charge will be 1.91 cents per kwh compared to 3.19 cents in 2022. At about 750 kwh of monthly consumption the service charge increase disappears and customers will experience a savings.

Hydro One's current rate application covers the 2023-2027 period. By 2027, the monthly charge for a seasonal customer is projected to be \$102.99. Projections for rates after that suggest a final monthly fixed charge in the \$150 per month range by 2032.

For year-round customers, although their basic service charge increased in 2023, provincial subsidies will keep monthly bills static until June when the Distribution Rate Protection subsidy is reviewed. That subsidy sets a monthly ceiling for basic service charges for year-round residential customers for several utilities, including Hydro One's rural classes, Sioux Lookout and Atikokan. Currently at \$38.08, the cap is subject to an annual inflation factor increase. Without the cap, the 2023 basic service charge for year-round R2 customers would be \$123.74.

Peak Perks for Lowering Electricity Use

The Ontario Government recently announced a new energy savings program. The Peak Perks program is intended to help lower energy use when consumption is at its highest.

According to Energy Minister Todd Smith, this new program will roll out in June, 2023. Participating customers who enroll in the program will receive a \$75 promotional prepaid credit card for this year and an additional \$20 prepaid credit card for each year a customer stays in the program. Participants must have a Smart thermostat installed, along with central air conditioning or a heat pump unit.

"Peak Perks has been designed to ensure that participants are always in control, and customers can opt out of any temperature change event without impacting the incentive that they receive through the program", says Minister Smith.

Participants will receive a notification when one of ten annual temperature changes will occur through their manufacturer on their mobile app and their thermostat.

Anyone interested can register at <https://saveonenergy.ca/en/For-Your-Home/Peak-Perks>

Check out our website at
dokura.com

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Hydro One Service Failure in Clearwater Bay Area - ---

An Ongoing Concern - Editorial by Director Dennis Wallace

Contact has been made on two occasions with Presidents of Hydro One over the past seven years with respect to poor service quality in parts of the Keeman Local Services Board area (KLSB). Extended exchanges have occurred with officials of Hydro One and, more recently, Ontario Energy Board officials who acted as quasi-mediators but improvements have been slow in coming and there is little interest, on Hydro One's part to put forward a plan to improve service.

KLSB residents, in particular those who have properties running along Highway #17 from the City of Kenora western boundary to the Manitoba border, have suffered years of chronic power outages after storms, during Hydro One scheduled service improvements and other events that result in extended power outages. Risks for owners include frozen waterlines and water along with spoiled food in freezers.

Problems include the fact that Hydro One's power supply goes in one direction only; from power lines near the Kenora boundary to the Manitoba boundary. Normally, a power system would have a circle of power supply so that, in the event of a power outage electricity can be fed from an active power supply with minimized outages overall. Hydro One will not change this. In addition, power lines on individual roads are radial – they supply power in one direction only. There is no redundancy. Hydro One will not change this either. They say costs would be prohibitively expensive.

Hydro One has installed reclosers on some roads to isolate portions of a damaged feeder to keep as many properties as possible serviced during an outage. However, as one travels towards the end of a radial line, there is no circular connection because service cannot be provided past the fault.

One of the largest causes of power outages are trees falling on power lines. There are corridors along the main power lines and distribution lines to residential properties. In the first contact with Menno Schmidt, then President of Hydro One seven years ago, it was advised that brushing would take place every four years instead of seven. A drive along main power line corridors and distribution lines would suggest that this is not being done. The next major brushing campaign is planned for 2024. What will this include?

The upshot of all of this is that many property owners have purchased backup generators, with a cost between \$15,000 and \$60,000 depending on the size of residential buildings. One road in KLSB has over 50% of properties with backup generators.

Hydro One acknowledges that two feeders (power connections) running along Highway #17 will be replaced to improve service stability. Officials claim that one feeder has been subject to a load transfer another has not.

Notably, a Hydro One official referred to KLSB properties as remote area(s). Given the value of the properties, their proximity to the Kenora boundary and Highway #17, remote hardly applies.

Hydro One argues that their reports indicate power supply reliability issues in the KLSB area are not excessive. Drilling down through their reports, it is evident that the Clearwater Bay area, served by feeders F1 and F2, have a greater number of medium impact outages at 41% and 57% compared to other feeders. Some customers have experienced 56 outages that lasted 5 – 10 hours (10 per year) and 147 occasions when there were power outages longer than 10 hours. It suggests that power outages on 25% of occasions can be lengthy thus the need for standby generators.

Analysis suggests that parts of KLSB have service quality in the bottom third of 3,000 service feeders in Ontario. Given power rates for rural customers of Hydro One, it is time that this company publish its plans to keep up stable power supply equal to neighbouring municipalities.

In addition, Hydro One and the Ontario Energy Board must recognize the fact that, in many areas of rural Ontario, dwellings are seasonal cottages. KLSB is a large jurisdiction with 2,300 properties in its catchment area. Property tax payments verify that dwellings, in the main, are what one would expect in an urban subdivision. Power supply cannot be variable and subject to frequent, extended outages.

It is time that Hydro One opens its doors to change.