

Minimum wage bill has far-reaching impacts

By Mark Pavilons

The provincial Bill 148 not only sets a new minimum wage standard, but its impacts will hit taxpayers where it hurts. Provisions of the bill extend to include wage parity and even impact volunteer firefighters.

All of this could add a significant financial burden to municipalities like King Township.

As King councillors and staff prepare the 2018 budget, this matter is causing some concern.

Councillor Bill Cober, at the last council meeting, asked staff about the potential impacts of Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017.

Treasurer Allan Evelyn said everyone needs to be mindful about the changes this act brings. He said it will result in changes to salary grids and will affect King's volunteer firefighters. The implications, he said, are "enormous."

"The financial burden is real," he stressed.

Cober stressed it's important for everyone "especially the public" to be aware of these sweeping impacts and significant costs associated with Bil 148.

King CAO Susan Plamondon said they've had discussions with staff at Queen's Park, who said the intention of the bill was not to impact emergency services. Municipalities have been assured, but so far, no word has come from the Province. What's needed, she said, are amendments to the Act.

The proposed changes address rates of pay, dates and times employees are scheduled to work and/or be on call, as well as working on public holidays.

All of these things, Plamondon said, will impact how the Township schedules its staff.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) shares local concerns.

AMO President Lynn Dollin was at Queen's Park last week, advocating for changes that would ensure effective and affordable public safety/emergency response.

"We depend on on-call and stand-by workers to step in during major storms, disasters and other emergencies," said Dollin.

"Collective agreements are negotiated to reflect these unique roles, and ensure fair compensation and treatment for these important workers."

Dollin is seeking amendments to fix the unintended consequences of Bill 148. For example, the bill would require matching pay for full-time and stand-by workers, and additional payments for on-call work, even volunteer firefighters.

"The Province agrees that municipal governments weren't the intended target of this bill. In fact municipal governments are employers of choice within their communities," Dollin said.

Municipal governments have been tallying the costs of the Bill 148's requirements. For some small and large urban municipalities the costs are upwards of \$1 to \$2 million per year.

"Across Ontario municipal costs are already rising at about \$1 billion per year, often driven by provincial laws and this is a text book example," Dollin added. "If they don't amend the bill, municipalities will be forced to either greatly increase property taxes, reduce local services " or both."

Tom Allen, president of the King Chamber of Commerce, said the legislation is far more costly for all employers.

"What do we think employers will do? Cut jobs, reduce service, increase prices," he said. "Look for municipalities to increase taxes to pay for the Province's new rules. I do not understand why governments think the economy is static and impacts are clear. The economy is dynamic, for every action there are several reactions."